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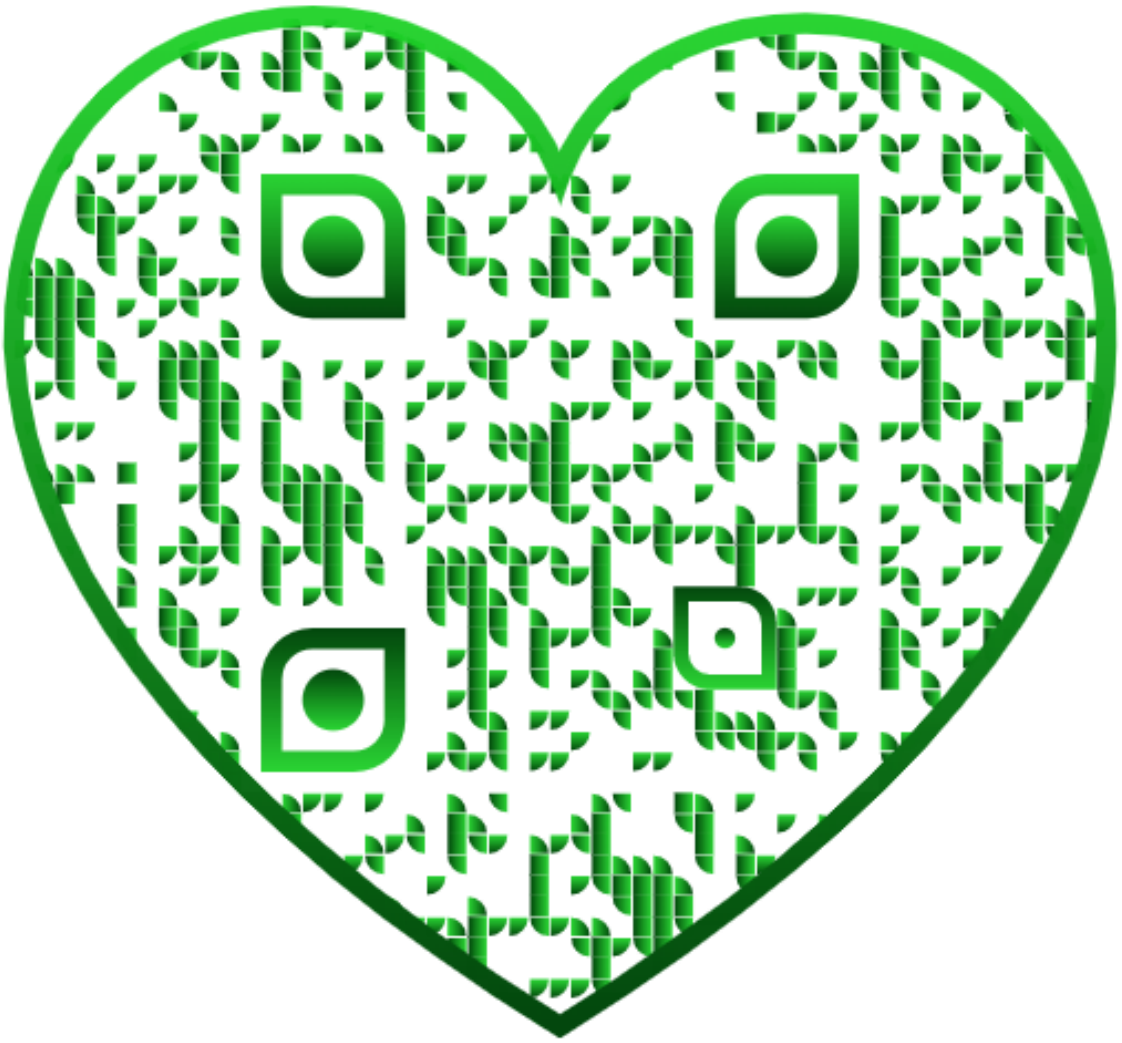

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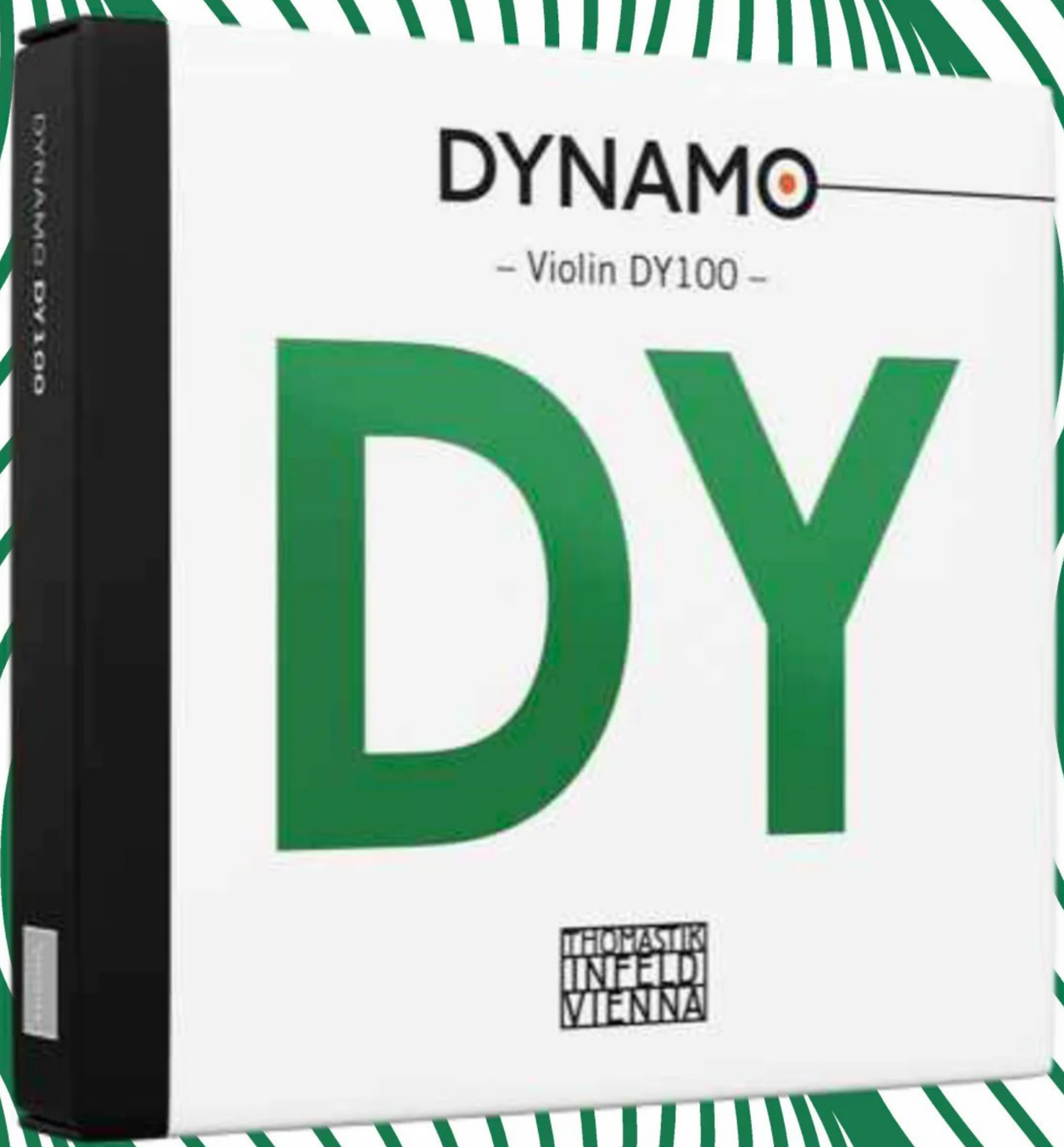

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Editor's letter

The Leonkoro Quartet, featured in our cover story this issue, may have only been founded in 2019, but the ensemble has already made a considerable impact, sweeping the board in recent competitions, attracting the attention of major promoters and now releasing a debut album. These four musicians are not going it alone, however; they are at the head of a particularly talented group of young string quartets emerging on to the post-pandemic scene. On page 24 Peter Somerford speaks to the foursome about what it takes to be a successful quartet in this day and age: a tale of hard work and challenging choices as well as the sheer joy of collaborative music making.

This issue also sees a focus on the bow – considered by many players to be the soul of the instrument. On page 36 Jacqueline Vanasse talks to a variety of players about what they look for in a bow, and for Making Matters on page 66 we turn the spotlight on maker Markus Laine, and discover how he approached a commission to make no fewer than 15 transitional bows for the members of one chamber orchestra.

October marks 50 years since the death of the great Pablo Casals. On page 44 Oskar Falta takes a close look at the cellist's legacy, particularly in relation to the Bach Cello Suites, which he famously brought out of relative obscurity over a century ago.

This month's issue also heralds the publication of The Strad Calendar 2024. The focus for the year falls on the instruments of the Fulton Collection – the life's passion of US software engineer and violinist David L. Fulton. On page 50 Christian Lloyd takes us on a tour of some of these priceless treasures.

Emma Baker editor

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Cover photo Peter Adamik

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Contributors

ANDREW FAIRFAX

(In Focus, page 57)

attended the Newark School of Violin Making before being employed by Charles Beare as a violin maker and restorer for over 30 years. He is now established independently with Anneleen Fairfax in Tunbridge Wells, UK.

ALEXANDRA GORSKI

(Opinion, page 21)

is a Ukrainian–American violinist, teacher and writer. She is the associate concertmaster of the Sofia Philharmonic, member of the Classic FM Radio Orchestra, and a principal member of recording groups The Sofia Session Orchestra and Bulgarian Symphony Orchestra.

STEPHEN KING

(Technique, page 74)

is a freelance viola player and director of engagement and learning with the Australian String Quartet (ASQ). He develops creative ways to take music beyond the concert hall. He was the ASQ's violist for a decade, and prior to that was a core member of the Australian Chamber Orchestra.

MARKUS LAINE

(Making Matters, page 66)

graduated from the Newark School of Violin Making in 2005. He worked for Philip Brown Violins and Christophe Landon Rare Violins before opening his shop in 2014 in New York City, where he now works as a violin and bow maker, restorer and appraiser.

DON LEISTER

(Trade Secrets, page 60)

is an award-winning self-taught violin maker working in Richmond, VA, US. He grew up in a family of artists and woodworkers and earned a BFA in painting and printmaking from Virginia Commonwealth University. He has played the violin for most of his life.

WIEBKE LÜDERS

(The Hardanger fiddle, page 30)

is a luthier based in Voss, Norway, specialising in the Hardanger fiddle. She has trained extensively as a musical instrument conservator, including at the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, and became a full-time instrument maker in 2016.

the Strad

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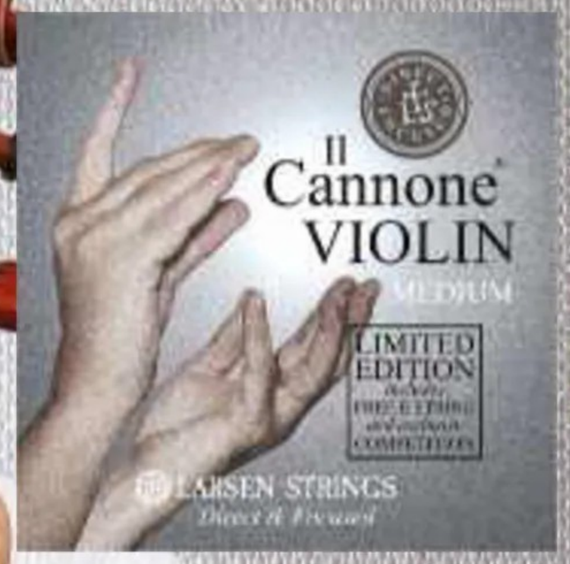

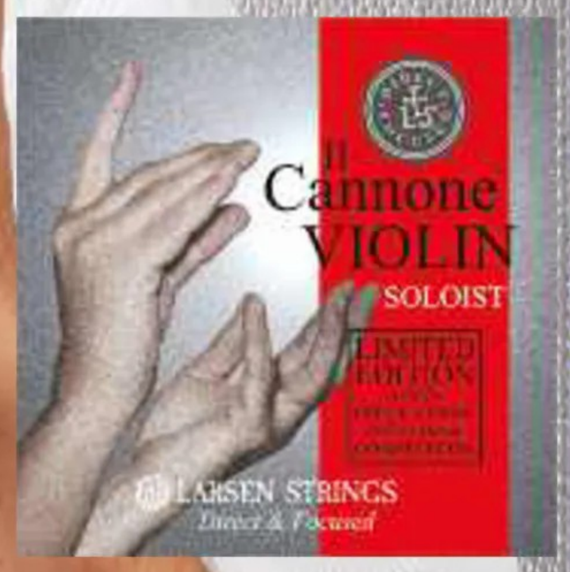

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LETTER *of the* MONTH

LIFE OF A VIOLIST

Lionel Tertis (*above*) may have been a saint in many ways, but he did Rebecca Clarke no favours as a composer, as Shiry Rashkovsky suggests in her article 'Seeking Utopia: celebrating the friendship between Tertis and Ralph Vaughan Williams' (bit.ly/47jorQ3). According to Clarke, Tertis swept into the artists' room after the concert when she introduced her already world-famous Viola Sonata to London, bellowing, 'Rebecca, you have saved the viola!' He immediately secured permission to perform the piece himself, relied on Clarke to help him find a substitute when his chosen pianist proved inadequate, performed it precisely once, never touched it again, and never – to Clarke's disgust – mentioned it in any of his books, which effectively defined the standard repertoire for generations.

Tertis listed Clarke as one of his students – she said her study with him amounted to a few coaching sessions early in her career – but he never spoke of her as a composer, in spite of the fact that the two of them knew one another professionally and socially from around 1910 until Tertis's death in 1975. It was a signal omission on Tertis's part, and it cannot have been accidental.

CHRISTOPHER JOHNSON
Brooklyn, NY, US

LETTER OF THE MONTH WINS

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CANARIES IN THE COAL MINE

I teach in the music department of an esteemed American university. Years ago I served on the department's library committee. These are generally made up of scholars – in our case musicologists, not performing musicians. The music library had a rich and large collection of recordings. Users could only listen to the collection within the library at listening stations set up for that purpose. The system had been in place for decades, ever since 'drop the needle' tests became an integral tool for assessing students' knowledge.

One day a member of our committee proposed allowing library users the chance to take recordings out of the library overnight. To me it seemed obvious that the first thing that would happen would be that borrowers would inevitably copy CDs on to their hard drives. The recording would become someone else's property without any compensation to the artist. My concern was met with a collective shrug. Before long, CDs were being allowed out for a week at a time, and making digital copies of recordings became standard practice.

At around the same time my wife, also a musician, met recently graduated students who had been hired to record musical 'samples' for software companies. The software was designed to help people compose music and hear a reasonable version of their work by utilising the samples. She pointed out that this had the potential to put musicians out of business. But a career in music is hard enough without turning down lucrative work, and her complaint was met with another shrug.

Connecting the dots to where we are now doesn't take a genius. Today, most recording artists make next to nothing from their recordings; they have virtually no control over their intellectual property. Streaming services hold all the cards, and instead of honing our craft, musicians have had to become experts in how to monetise their work over social media. Broadway musicals contract fewer actual musicians: through hardball negotiating producers have been allowed to use recorded and digital content to back up their actors and shrink the number of professional musicians in their pits.

Why bring up all this history? Because the advent of AI has the potential to stifle the passion and creativity of an equally large group of talented people, and with much more money on the line. Before you think this is someone else's problem remember what happened to musicians. We were the canaries in the coal mine.

STEPHEN J. HARRISON
Palo Alto, CA, US

LOOK ON THE BRIGHT SIDE

In response to Philippa Bunting's article about what constitutes a 'bad student' (bitly.ws/Sff5), I would say: there is no such thing. The teacher and student must be compatible in order for the child to thrive and enjoy their violin lessons. As most violinists know, it can often be that their first or second violin teacher may not be right for them, or the methods the teacher uses may not work or be suited to them, depending on whether they want to make a career playing the violin. For some children the Suzuki method will be enough for them to play for fun and maybe join a community orchestra.

For the student who wants to do their graded ABRSM exams then an ABRSM-approved method such as Stepping Stones is the best option, as the ABRSM has now stopped including Suzuki pieces in the exam books. This is because the violin students had not actually learnt to read musical notation but instead learnt the stupidly complicated pieces by listening to the pre-recorded CD. This meant that most children who showed genuine promise of becoming very good violinists were learning everything by ear and following finger numbers in the first position.

My philosophy was that if a student didn't practise then they wouldn't move on to the next piece, which would be even more fun than the one they were on. This worked nearly every time. Most of my serious students stayed with me all the way from Grade 1 to Grade 8 and all but three achieved distinctions on their ABRSM graded exams and have gone on the be accepted at some of the most prestigious music schools in the UK. So there is no such thing as a bad student.

SAM DAY
Brighton, East Sussex, UK

ONLINE COMMENT

Readers also took to social media to share their thoughts on Philippa Bunting's article about the existence of 'bad students': bitly.ws/Sff5

G.E. FROIDEVAL It depends on the pupil's motivations: are they willing to learn or are they forced?

VICTOR YIP The danger of this writer's belief is that it puts the responsibility on the teacher. It teaches the student nothing about accountability that is innate to their role.

EMMANUELLE KLEIN WORKS You do realise that some students do not want to be there, right? A teacher may be able to change their mind in one-to-one sessions or small groups, but it's still not their job. It's the parents' responsibility to prepare their children to learn.

JOSEPH SCHEER Bad parents, maybe?

www.thestrad.com TOP 3 ONLINE POSTS

1 28-year-old violinist Ji Soo Choi has died bitly.ws/SfpK

2 The Sound of Islay: the violin made from a whisky barrel (*below*) bitly.ws/Sfq2

3 Nashville Symphony appoints new concertmaster bitly.ws/Sfqj

PODCAST OF THE MONTH

the Strad PODCAST

Episode #89 Playing in Broadway shows with violist Stephanie Baer bitly.ws/Sfrf

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On the beat

News and events from around the world this month

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A hot-button topic

The past summer has seen catastrophic heatwaves strike almost all of Europe. What effect have they had on the forests of spruce and maple that tonewood dealers depend on?

By Harry White

Tonewood at the European HQ of Alpentonholz Pahler

The recent pan-European heatwave has placed new pressures on suppliers of tonewood for musical instruments. Competition from China, inflation and global economic instability have already led some suppliers to quit the trade. But climate change is further turning up the heat. The conditions pose a threat to an already precarious supply of the premium aged European maple prized by luthiers, as well as the condition of spruce forests, which have historically been a more accessible and carefully managed tonewood asset across central Europe.

The selection and harvesting of tonewood for making stringed instruments is so specialised that, even in ideal climate conditions, only a relatively small sample of elite wood will make the grade. The observation process begins with checking for no visible branch scars, injuries or signs of rotting on the standing tree, before monitoring the sawn trunk for regular growth (evinced by a regular annual ring width), a straight grain, compression and a low proportion of late wood (the darker part of the annual ring growth). The luthier will then assess the board for detailed aspects such as light wood, medullary rays and resin pockets; trees that meet the criteria perfectly are extremely rare.

It stands to reason that heat stress is equally as applicable to trees as humans, impacting on their health and wellbeing in such a way that their suitability for tonewood is compromised. 'The increase in temperatures affects the forest, especially at lower altitudes of up to 1,000 metres, on sites where the soils dry out quickly,' explains forest engineer, violinist and author Philippe Domont, founder of Sylvacom. 'This year has been extremely hot. The WSL [Swiss federal institute for forest, snow and landscape research] measured that the spruces at low altitudes lost 50 per cent of their growth this year. Additionally, forest damage as a result of climate change continues to give rise to more damage on trees by the bark beetle, especially on the sites that are now drying out the fastest.'

Andreas Pahler started cutting wood for violin makers in 2002 and is founder of Alpentonholz Pahler, based in Altomünster and in Mittenwald, just north of the mountains of South Tyrol where he sources spruce. 'The spruce suffers from heat and dryness generated by rising temperatures,' he explains. 'Once the tree is weakened, it can be easily attacked by bark beetles. Over the past decade we have learnt that bark beetles are also active in higher regions of the Alps where trees for violin making are

COURTESY ANDREAS PAHLER

'Forest damage as a result of climate change continues to give rise to more damage to trees by the bark beetle'
– Philippe Domont, founder, Sylvacom

growing. That's a new development. For almost 20 years I sourced wood from the forests of Italy's Val de Fiemme. But after the great storm of 2018 many forest landowners still suffering from bark beetle are no longer able to supply premium-grade trees.'

The situation, however, should not induce alarmism. 'The majority of the tonewood spruces are located between 1,100 and 1,600 metres above sea level, where the climate is in any case fresher than in the low plains,' says Domont. 'The cold is a minimum factor for tree growth in the mountains, so greater warmth can actually be an advantage if the precipitation is sufficient. In the Alps, many mountain forests have no forest roads, so no timber is harvested. Among other things, there is a rise in spruce trees with diameters greater than 60cm, which is interesting for instrument making, particularly cello, guitar and double bass.' He continues: 'The actual number of trees that died because of drought or forest fire in the mountains is not especially large in relation to the total forest area. In the resulting forest gaps, natural forest regeneration then also occurs. To date, forest fires in the Alps affect very small areas, so globally they are not relevant. Locally, however, they are very problematic, especially if the burnt forest has a protective function. But it's interesting to note that if tonewood spruce were to burn, its wood would remain entirely usable for violin making because only the crowns burn in a forest fire.'

Pahler would like to see the encouragement of a greater diversity of tonewood supply, especially when considering the demand for flamed maple, which is vulnerable to the same climate threat as spruce, and highly sought-after for its aesthetic (rather than acoustic) properties. 'The quality of trees has decreased, especially in south-east Europe's maple stands,' he says. 'High wood prices have led to exploitation and there is not much left in the forests of Bosnia. In Romania in particular, wood dealers are carrying the last available trees to central Europe often without due diligence. To my mind, I'd wish that makers would accept lower optical qualities of wood that have similar sound properties. We could search for characterful pieces of wood bearing a small knot or wider-grain maple, rather than only sourcing the classic Bosnian type. Also, alternative woods for the instrument backs like willow, poplar, nut or cherry look and sound very attractive and remain much more accessible.' So, while climate conditions continue to add to the challenges facing suppliers of tonewood, changing attitudes towards wood types may help offer a sustainable vision for the instruments of the future.

KEITH SAUNDERS

NEWS IN BRIEF

Goldner Quartet to disband after 30 years bit.ly/3qxEGZc
Australia's Goldner Quartet (*below*) has announced that it will disband in 2024 in its 30th anniversary year. The quartet comprises violinists Dene Olding and Dimity Hall, violist Irina Morozova and cellist Julian Smiles. It was formed in 1995 and named in honour of the founder of Musica Viva, Richard Goldner.

Premio Paganini presents a 3D-printed copy of 'Il Cannone' violin bit.ly/3OHivb2
Italy's Premio Paganini violin competition marked its 70th anniversary by creating a 3D copy of the 1743 'Il Cannone' violin by Guarneri 'del Gesù', which belonged to Nicolò Paganini. The 3D-printed 1:1 copy is made with white resin and red nylon strings, representing the colours of St George's flag and the new logo for the competition. 'The 3D "Il Cannone" is an opportunity provided by new technology, and it can be brought to schools and all over the city to commemorate Paganini in an unconventional way,' commented the mayor of Genoa, Marco Bucci.

String quartet swaps planes for trains on sustainable European tour bit.ly/3QSFX7X
The all-female UK string quartet Vulva Voce has recently completed a European tour dedicated to sustainability, with all travelling exclusively land-based. According to the ensemble, one person travelling by plane from London to Stockholm emits 260kg of carbon dioxide. The same journey by train only produces 11kg. 'The climate crisis presents us with a challenge,' said violinist Georgina MacDonell Finlayson.

Do you have a topical story concerning the string music world? Email us at **thestrad@thestrad.com**

OBITUARIES

SHERBAN LUPU

Violin performer, teacher and music editor Sherban Lupu has died aged 71. He was considered one of the leading Romanian violinists of the last century and a champion of works by George Enescu.

Born in Brașov in 1952, Lupu studied at the Bucharest Conservatoire with George Manoliu, going on to study in London at the Guildhall School of Music with Yfrah Neaman, and later with Dorothy DeLay. At Indiana University he studied with Josef Gingold and received chamber music coaching from Menahem Pressler.

Lupu was associate concertmaster of the San Francisco Opera from 1978 to 1980, and held the position of professor emeritus of violin at the University of Illinois. In collaboration with the composer Cornel Țăranu, he finished and reconstructed Enescu's *Caprice Roumain* for violin and orchestra. In collaboration with the Romanian Cultural Institute he published six volumes of previously unknown works for violin by Enescu, which he discovered, edited and arranged. From 2011 he was president of the George Enescu Society of the United States.

In 2004 Lupu was made a Commander of the National Order of Merit and Service, and received an award for outstanding teaching from the Polish Ministry of Culture.

MARIANA SÎRBU

Romanian violinist and teacher Mariana Sîrbu died on 1 August. In 1994 she established the Stradivari Quartet, and was concertmaster of the I Musici chamber orchestra from 1992 to 2003. Most recently she was appointed principal guest director of the Irish Chamber Orchestra.

Born in Iași, Sîrbu began her musical studies with her parents. She went on to study with Ștefan Gheorghiu at the 'Ciprian Porumbescu' National University of Music in Bucharest.

In 1968 Sîrbu founded the Academica Quartet. The ensemble won prizes at several international competitions including Liège (1972), Munich (1973), Geneva (1974) and Belgrade (1975). She joined the Trio di Milano in 1985, with pianist Bruno Canino and cellist Rocco Filippini.

Sîrbu performed as a soloist in many of the world's great concert halls. As an educator she served as a professor at the Leipzig Musikhochschule. She also taught at the Sermoneta instrumental specialisation courses, and at the Pontino di Musica Festival. She played the 1702 'Conte di Fontana' Stradivari violin.

JI SOO CHOI

Violinist Ji Soo Choi died on 25 July at the age of 28. The South Korean-born musician became well known in Canada, where she studied at the Glenn Gould School, part of the Royal Conservatory of Music.

Born in 1994, Choi began her violin studies in South Korea. She received bachelor's and master's degrees from the Juilliard School, where she studied with Ida Kavafian and Daniel Phillips, before moving to Canada to continue her studies.

At the age of 18 Choi was the grand prize winner of the Canadian Music Competition. In the same year she was named as one of Canada's '30 under 30 Top Classical Musicians of 2013' by CBC Radio Canada. She performed as a soloist at the Banff Summer Music Festival in 2014 and led the Baroque group in 2016. She also performed with the Brott Music Festival's National Academy Orchestra (NAO) of Canada in 2021.

Choi performed on the c.1840 'Eckhardt-Grammate, Joachim' Georges Chanot I violin, part of the Canada Council for the Arts' Musical Instrument Bank. The violin was featured in the 'In Focus' article in *The Strad*'s July 2023 issue.

FLORENCE MALGOIRE

The French violinist, conductor and teacher Florence Malgoire died on 11 August in Marseille. She was 63. A specialist in early music, Malgoire taught at the Conservatoire de Genève and the Schola Cantorum de Paris from 2000 until her death.

Born in 1960 in Dugny, north-east Paris, Malgoire was the daughter of the oboist and conductor Jean-Claude Malgoire. She studied with Sigiswald Kuijken, and from the age of 17 performed in 'La Grande Ecurie et la Chambre du Roy', the orchestra founded by her father. She also held solo positions in Baroque ensembles such as La Chapelle Royale, Les Talens Lyriques and Les Arts Florissants.

Malgoire founded or co-founded several ensembles, such as the all-female chamber group Les Nièces de Rameau, and Les Dominos, an ensemble specialising in music of the 17th and 18th centuries. She worked around the world as a tutor of early music, including Tokyo, Rio de Janeiro and the Juilliard School in New York. She recorded for Harmonia Mundi, Ricercar, Psalmus, Disques Pierre Vérany, Zig-Zag Territoires and Accord/Universal.

LARRY GRIKA

US violinist Larry Grika died on 8 August at the age of 90. He was a member of the Philadelphia Orchestra for more than four decades, until his retirement in 2005.

Grika was born in October 1932 in Chicago, IL. He received musical training at the Chicago Musical College, Roosevelt University, while performing with the Lyric Opera Orchestra. He was drafted into the US Army in 1956 and served three years in Washington DC, during which he attended Catholic University and received his master's degree in music.

Following his graduation Grika joined the Cincinnati Symphony as a violinist and taught at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, OH, before moving to Philadelphia where he became a member of the Philadelphia Orchestra in 1964. He held the position for 41 years, and continued to play with the orchestra as a substitute until 2012, when he was 80 years old. He taught chamber music, orchestral repertoire and violin at Temple University, Bryn Mawr College and Glassboro College, as well as numerous students privately.

MALGOIRE PHOTO JEAN-BAPTISTE MILLOT

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POWER PLAY: A flash mob of over 50 young musicians aged between 11 and 25 took over London's Battersea Power Station on 15 July. The musicians came from the capital's World Heart Beat Music Academy and Brazil's Maré do Amanhã orchestra, which was on a European tour. The group performed a spontaneous version of *Aquarela do Brasil* ('Watercolour of Brazil'), before Maré do Amanhã went on to perform at the Brazilian Embassy. Both organisations aim to transform the lives of young people by nurturing their musical talent. Photo: Marco Brendon

PREMIERE *of the* MONTH

True to life

A new double concerto in memory of an extraordinary woman

COMPOSER **Elena Kats-Chernin**
WORK ***Sarenka Concerto***
ARTIST **Dale Barltrop (vn) Rachael Tobin (vc) Melbourne Symphony Orchestra/ Chloé van Soeterstède**
DATE **27 October 2023**
PLACE **Hamer Hall, Melbourne, Australia** bitly.ws/SEF7

Elena Kats-Chernin

Dale Barltrop and Rachael Tobin

KATS-CHERNIN PHOTO BRURIA HAMMER. BARLTROP PHOTO LAURA MAINARTI. TOBIN PHOTO COURTESY MSO

Australian composer Elena Kats-Chernin's *Sarenka Concerto* for violin, cello and orchestra honours the life of Sara Weis – nicknamed Sarenka by her family. As a child in Poland, Weis lost her family in the Holocaust. 'She escaped as a 16-year-old and went into the resistance,' says Kats-Chernin. Years afterwards Weis moved to Melbourne, where she and her husband set up a successful pantyhose business and raised a family, members of which came to Kats-Chernin to commission the work. Violinist Dale Barltrop and cellist Rachael Tobin will perform alongside the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra.

'I had the idea of a musical portrait, but it's difficult because music isn't literal,' says Kats-Chernin. 'So I also included her life experiences and aimed to make it a piece she would enjoy listening to. These three things all merged.' Kats-Chernin is fond of writing for strings and in this piece she sees the 'violin as the sky and the cello as the ground'.

The work's six movements capture key moments in Weis's life. The first is 'Childhood'. 'It's happy but bittersweet,' says Kats-Chernin. 'It starts gently, but then has rich moments.' The hard-hitting second movement represents the wartime years and has a 'feeling of danger' with brutal sounds in the strings. The third movement, 'Hope', reflects on what just happened. A melody repeats with varying textures. Next is 'Good times', which includes factory-like noises and hints of tango and ragtime, representing Weis's business and social life in Australia. The waltz-like fifth movement has a sparse texture, created by the solo instruments playing two octaves apart. The last movement begins with an anti-Nazi partisan song, then restates earlier material and includes a cadenza. 'I wanted to finish it optimistically, but with a mood that's more internal than joyful,' says Kats-Chernin. 'I'm so grateful the family asked me to compose this. I hope they think it's true to Sarenka.'

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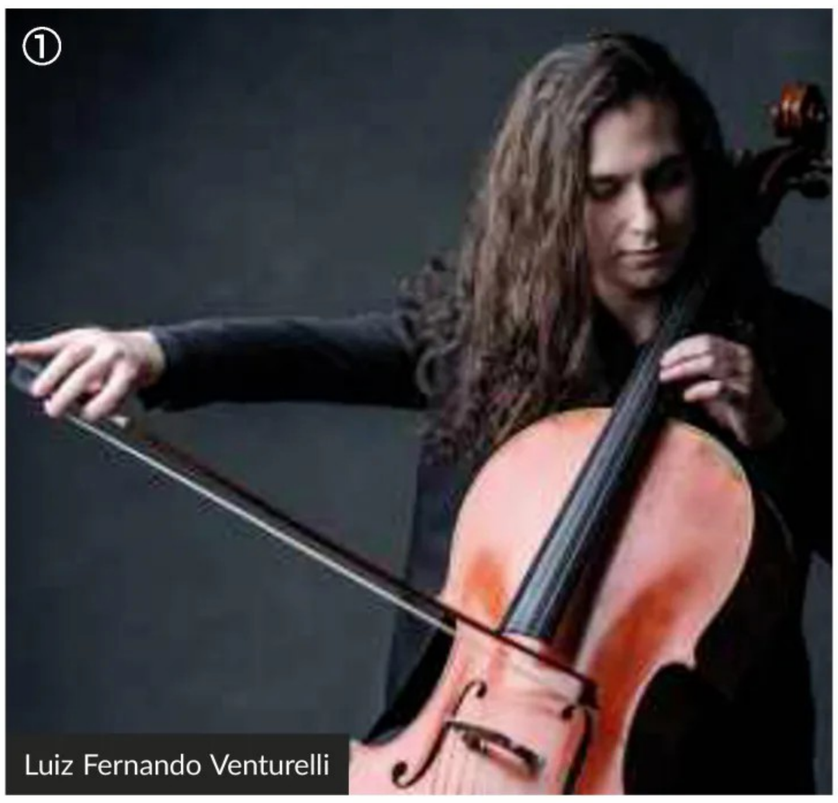
COMPETITIONS


Luiz Fernando Venturelli

Anne-Sophie Mutter

Lucilla Rose Mariotti

❶ The Meadowmount School of Music in NY, US, has awarded its second annual **Gurrena Fellowship**, worth $50,000, to Brazilian cellist **Luiz Fernando Venturelli**, 23. The Fellowship's support includes housing allowances, artist management, concert engagements and collaborations with the Meadowmount faculty. Venturelli is a graduate of Northwestern University and has performed as a soloist throughout South America.

❷ The **Deutsche Streicherphilharmonie** has been awarded the $25,000 **Würth Prize**. The youth string orchestra based in Bonn, Germany, was founded in 1973 and is made up of string players aged 11 to 21. The prize has been awarded since 1991 to artists, ensembles or projects demonstrating the values of Jeunesses Musicales Germany, a German cultural organisation dedicated to supporting young musicians.

❸ The 2023 **Opus Klassik Awards** featured several top string players including violinist **Anne-Sophie Mutter**, who won Instrumentalist of the Year; cellist **Bruno Delepelaire**, who was named Young Instrumentalist of the Year; violinist **David Garrett**, who won Best Seller of the Year; and violinist **Rachel Podger**, who took the award for solo instrument with her album *Tutta Sola*.

❹ Italian violinist **Lucilla Rose Mariotti**, 22, won first prize and €5,000 at the inaugural **'Violins & Soul' Salon Music Violin Competition**. She also received the two-year loan of a Stradivari violin and the €500 audience prize. US violinist Karisa Minji Chiu, 23, took home the €3,000 second prize, while the €1,000 third prize went to Dongyoung Jake Shim, 21, from South Korea.

FORTHCOMING COMPETITIONS & AWARDS

Geneva Junior Music Competition in Geneva, Switzerland, for violinists and cellists aged 5–25. First prize CHF2,000 (£1,800) **Deadline** 20 November; competition 15 April 2024 **Web** genevajmc.com

Antonio Mormone International Prize in Milan, Italy, for violinists aged 16–28. First prize €30,000 **Deadline** 1 December; competition 16–22 June 2025 **Web** antoniomormone.org

Prague Spring International Music Competition in Prague, Czech Republic, for violinists aged 30 or under. First prize CZK250,000 (£9,000) **Deadline** 1 December; competition 6–14 May 2024 **Web** bitly.ws/SkLo

APPOINTMENTS

- US violinist **Stefan Jackiw** has been appointed artistic director of the Hawaii Chamber Music Festival
- The Parker Quartet will begin as quartet-in-residence at the Walnut Hill School of the Arts for the 2023–24 school year
- The Nashville Symphony Orchestra has announced that violinist **Peter Otto** will start as its new concertmaster in January 2024
- Canadian violinist **Boson Mo** has been appointed concertmaster of the Phoenix Symphony Orchestra

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VENTURELLI PHOTO TODD ROSENBERG. MUTTER PHOTO JAPAN ARTISTS ASSOCIATION/SANKEI SHIMBUN MARIOTTI PHOTO SARAH FERARA.

SHOULDER REST

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FEATURED PRODUCT

The new Kun Seven violin shoulder rest, from Canadian manufacturer Kun, marks a departure for the company, says Juliana Farha, managing director of Kun Europe. 'We didn't want to be bound by assumptions of how it *needed* to work, like a usual bridge-style shoulder rest. It was an interesting, creative product development challenge.' The Kun Seven's key innovation is in decoupling the bridge and pad. 'With a traditional shoulder rest there's always a compromise between the most secure and the most comfortable positions,' she says. 'With the Kun Seven we wanted to make it customisable enough for the user not to have to surrender to that compromise. Maximum customisation encompasses a whole range of things: manipulating the pad, changing the height, moving the pad and more. Each has its own challenges.'

The plastic composite bridge's inner part can be extended by using a brass spring clip and the feet's screws are offset to reach further down the purfling and better secure the rest. The foam pad is covered in a silicone-coated fabric for extra grip and has an aluminium core that players can manipulate and angle. A coupler joint and brass lever attach the pad to the bridge, allowing the player to slide the pad along the bridge. Blocks can be added for extra height, while incremental height changes are made using the feet's screws. The bridge also features a numbering system to help the user remember their preferred setting.

The shoulder rest comes with height-adjustment blocks, instructions and tools for the set-up. An online instructional video will go live on the Kun Seven website once the product is available. 'We're aiming to offer as much support with this as possible,' says Farha. 'There's a lot you can do with it and we hope people will have the opportunity to explore that.'

Kun Seven violin shoulder rest approx. $220–250
email contact via website
web www.kunrest.com

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Originally designed for woodworkers, StopLossBags are now available to luthiers. The product holds and keeps varnishes, stains and paints fresh, thanks to its 3-ply construction and a design that stops air from entering the bag. The user can pour out the exact amount of liquid they need, plus the bags are reusable and hold one litre.

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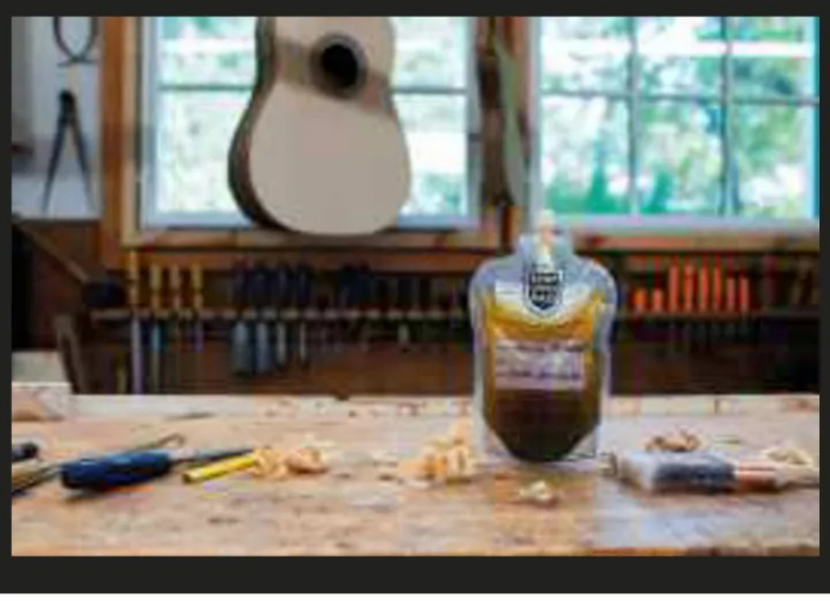

CELLO CASE

LIGHT TOUCH

At 3.3kg, BAM's new Sky Hightech Slim cello case is the lightest in the company's range. The interior includes a suspension system, foam cushions, two bow holders and a pocket for strings. The exterior is made from a 3-ply structure of ABS and polyurethane foam, and features two anti-slip straps and five latches.

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Life lessons

Nils Mönkemeyer

The German violist on finding his confidence and the journey of becoming a soloist

From an early age I knew, perhaps not consciously, that I always liked playing the lower register of the violin more than the higher register. I sounded nicer on the lower strings. And one time at youth orchestra I swapped instruments with the violist in my quartet and it was the exact sound I had been looking for since starting the violin. So at the age of 15, I made the switch from violin to viola.

My first viola teacher was Christian Pohl. He was an incredible psychologist. As a teenager I lacked self-confidence and wasn't very comfortable with myself. In lessons, if he saw I was having problems, he would immediately sit me down, and ask if I wanted tea and if I wanted to play or not. He had a great way of calming me down and building my confidence. And so for me, playing the viola is intimately linked to finding myself as a person.

I was definitely a late bloomer in terms of the viola, and so it was around my university years in Munich that I became more professional. From my teacher Hariolf Schlichtig I learnt so much about my attitude towards music, as well as how to be modest and really enjoy the process of discovering repertoire. A few years later came the realisation that the path I had thought I was taking up to that point – to become an orchestral player – was not right for me. This was because of two experiences.

Mönkemeyer with Lynn Harrell at the Kronberg Academy in 2008

TOP PHOTO IRÈNE ZANDEL. BOTTOM PHOTO KRONBERG ACADEMY/ANDREAS MALKMUS

I always got very nervous playing in orchestral viola sections, and had a hard time blending in. My playing wasn't suited to it. And when I got to the third round of a principal viola audition for the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra and was told I didn't get the job, I was shocked. I thought I had played so well. They told me my playing was too free and soloistic, and I didn't have the orchestra in mind, which was completely true. The second experience was when I met Yuri Bashmet not long after. At one point he asked, 'When you do have your next solo concert?', assuming that solo playing was my main job. These two key moments made me realise I should be a soloist. And from there on I had to find a way to make that a reality.

To become a soloist, you have to find your trademark and what makes you unique. It took a long time for me to figure that out, and it's important to talk to people, ask for help and not be proud. The most difficult moment is when you know exactly what you want to do, but the outside world doesn't realise it yet. But you need to believe in your abilities first, otherwise no one else will. Learning to trust yourself is a never-ending process. I try to see every concert as a life lesson because every experience on stage is another opportunity to reflect and learn something valuable.

Learning to trust yourself is a never-ending process

INTERVIEW BY RITA FERNANDES

STRENGTH IN FLEXIBILITY

Violinist **Alexandra Gorski** argues that an orchestra's greatest asset is not power or accuracy; rather the ability to adapt seamlessly to every style of music and manner of conductor

In a world of constant concerts and endless symphonies, orchestras demand a great deal from their members. Superior personal playing and musicianship, knowledge of repertoire, teamwork; as orchestral musicians, we must juggle it all.

When playing in an orchestra, musicians are constantly working on different programmes with different conductors, which in turn lead to different interpretations and styles. One concert might contain music by Wagner, Schnittke and Schoenberg, the next Haydn and Mozart, and the very next might be an opera gala: all place wildly contrasting musical demands on an orchestra. (This is no random example – these were three back-to-back programmes I played in within two weeks!) Each of these concerts calls for a different method of sound production, different approaches to balance and intonation, and even different styles of bowing.

Performing in an environment that every few days requires a radical change in the way you approach your playing can certainly be a challenge, but it is also stimulating and exciting. Even playing the same repertoire repeatedly within a single concert season but under different conductors can be unpredictable. In the past three months I have played Schubert's Ninth Symphony four times, and none of the performances were the same: each conductor had their own interpretation of the work, and a different style of conducting.

Considering our state of constant change, I've observed that one of the most fundamental and important requirements from an orchestra is adaptability. It's not the first quality that usually comes to mind when thinking about the measure of a good orchestra; reputable symphony or philharmonic orchestras are usually hailed as 'refined' or 'accurate'; seldom 'adaptable'. In reality, one of our main duties playing together in an orchestra is to be responsive and malleable to the wishes of every conductor and to the needs of every programme. The sound we applied last week in the Wagner concert is no longer appropriate in the Haydn concert – new techniques must be employed on a regular basis.

Orchestras are usually hailed as 'refined' or 'accurate'; seldom as 'adaptable'

In the case where an orchestra repeats repertoire, adaptability is even more important. An orchestra must be flexible in the hands of each conductor, accepting of all the musical decisions that come with their interpretation. This is the part that can be difficult: not every orchestra is so malleable, especially when there is disagreement about interpretation. Sometimes an orchestra can become stuck in its ways, accustomed to a certain mode of playing after years of repetition and experience.

I've seen it first-hand: members of a group refuting a conductor's musical choices, whether it be in the tempo, phrasing, or even the decision to observe a repeat. Of course, there cannot always be unanimous agreement within the orchestra for every performance, and it is rarely the case. We may even vehemently dislike and disagree with the interpretation offered to us, but ultimately our job is to execute the conductor's vision, regardless of our personal feelings about that vision.

An orchestra's willingness and ability to adapt to every musical situation is perhaps its most practical skill. Although it can be challenging, it's also part of the fun: there's still room for the unexpected, even when we think we've heard it all. With every programming of a familiar symphony or concerto, orchestras can only hope that the conductor might offer something unique in their interpretation. If we are lucky, we ourselves might even experience something new, something different: we just have to be ready to adapt.

Life is sweet

A stay in northern Bavaria's spa town of Bad Kissingen for the Kissinger Sommer festival proved to be a balm for the soul for **Laurence Vittes**

Amid a summer of wonderful European music festivals, Kissinger Sommer 2023 (16 June to 16 July) stood out for the depth and diversity of its programming, the excellence of its artists and the sheer beauty and elegance of the surroundings.

The German spa town of Bad Kissingen is situated in northern Bavaria. During the 19th century, it reached the height of its popularity as a summer wellness retreat – a magnet for tourists seeking the healing properties of its mineral springs. These days, the streets around the neo-Baroque Regentenbau, which houses several concert halls including the Max-Littmann-Saal, are filled with shops, restaurants and ice cream parlours. On approaching the Regentenbau from the rose garden across the street – with its thousands of bushes and more than 150 varieties of blooms, and its multimedia fountain with colourful water choreography – you are struck by the full grandeur of the building's impact. You can take a relaxing stroll along the many paths that meander through the town that are interconnected by the walkway alongside the Franconian Saale river; and if you're just looking for a bite to eat, there are pathways leading to the restaurants along Kurhausstrasse.

The courtyard of the Regentenbau

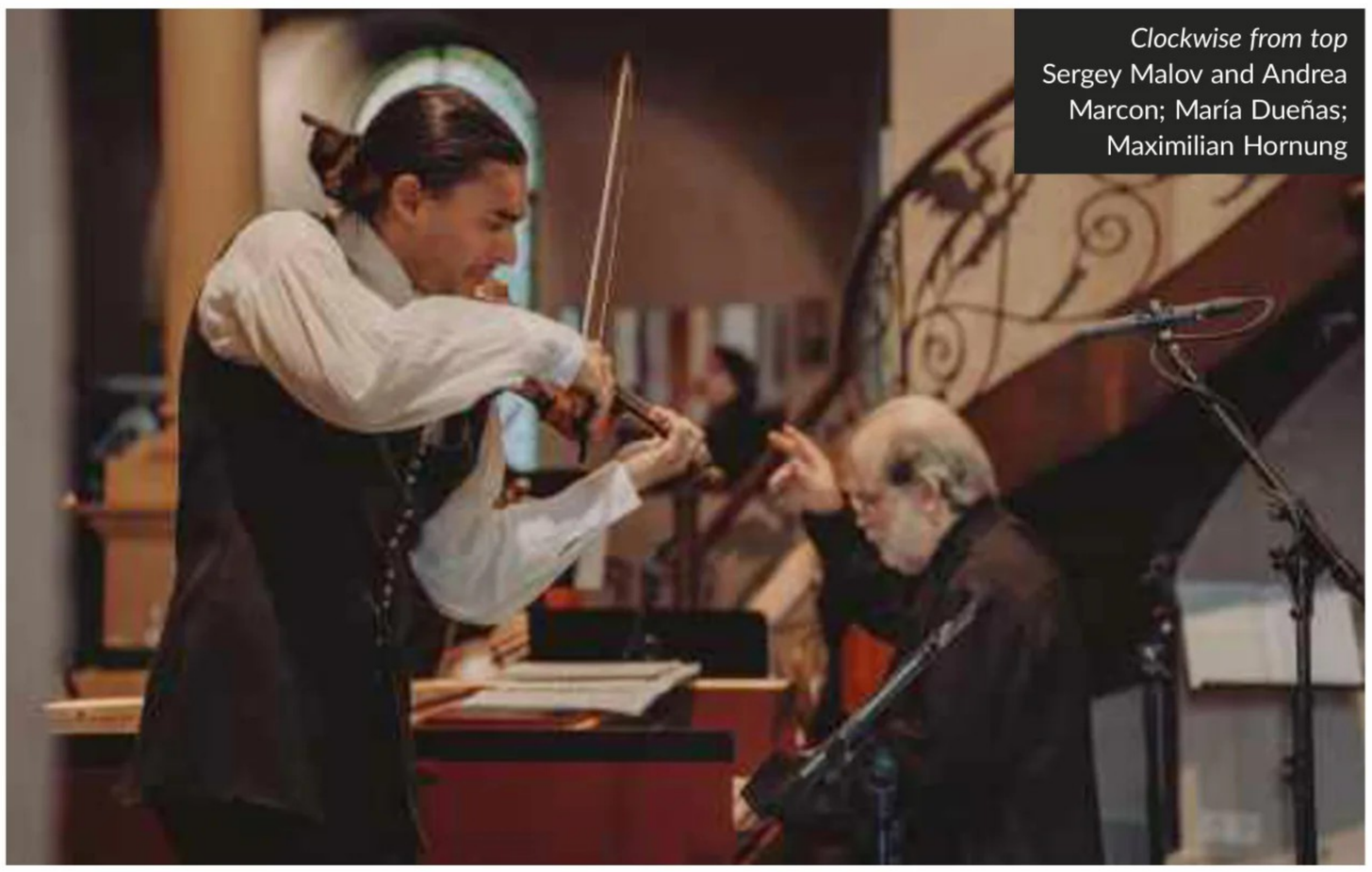
The soothing, healing and wellness comforts of the KissSalis Thermal Spa are to be found just up the hill. Bad Kissingen is perfectly paced for the pleasures and romance of classical music.

The festival has taken place every year since 1986, apart from 2020 when it was cancelled owing to the pandemic. Over the past ten years it has featured such string playing stars as violinists Ning Feng and Patricia Kopatchinskaja and cellist Sol Gabetta as artists-in-residence. The overall theme for this year's festival was 'La dolce vita', centring on Italian musical journeys, and particularly one taken by Rossini, who spent four weeks in Bad Kissingen in the summer of 1856 on the advice of his doctor. The whole event was further divided into five subthemes, and I attended during the 'Mi lagnerò tacendo' (I will suffer in silence) one, which took place from Wednesday 28 June to Sunday 2 July and began with mezzo-soprano Giuseppina Bridelli giving a recital with pianist Matteo Pais in the Rossini-Saal which fans of Cecilia Bartoli would have adored and during which the enthusiastic audience took the opportunity to connect with friends.

What of the strings component? As a cellist, I was blown away by the next two concerts. On 29 June, Maximilian Hornung played Haydn's Cello Concerto no.2 in D major at the Max-Littmann-Saal. He was accompanied by the Bamberg Symphony, which had reduced its string section somewhat but still included three double basses and was conducted very enthusiastically (in two where possible) by Manfred Honeck. It is Haydn's D major and not the First Concerto in C major that every cellist is asked to play in auditions, and Hornung and Honeck together challenged the notion that the first movement could be played too fast under the pressure of a live concert. It was brave and passionate, if not neat and immaculate. Hornung revealed a glimpse of the music's softer heart in his short cadenzas, in contrast to the passages he had so boldly tried to conquer.

The concert had begun with a witty, open-hearted reading of Rossini's overture to *La gazza ladra* which pushed the music, and the musicians, to full tilt.

NINJA ANDERLOHR-HEPP



Clockwise from top Sergey Malov and Andrea Marcon; María Dueñas; Maximilian Hornung

The orchestra was equal to every challenge, even more after the interval in an exhilarating performance of Schubert's 'Great' Symphony in C major. Honeck had provided the bowings from his own set of parts and this ensured a strong, unified string force which the orchestra's woodwind adorned and infused with exuberant pastel colours. All this, and the eloquent brass, was amplified by the enveloping acoustic warmth of the horseshoe-shaped hall.

The following night, purely by coincidence, another cellist – of a considerably different stripe – came to town. It was Sergey Malov playing two concertos each on the violin and the violoncello da spalla (an instrument of griffin-like provenance for which Bach may have written his Cello Suite no.6), replacing violinist Chouchane Siranossian at late notice, with Andrea Marcon's Venice Baroque Orchestra. The concert they played in the responsive acoustics of the nearby Erlöserkirche could have been the soundtrack to an audiophile's Baroque music dream. The programme was called 'Duello di archi' (String Duel), and there was a lot of that, especially when Malov switched over to the violin in a hair-raising Tartini Concerto in B flat major; his freely expressive, even more freely improvisatorial style had the Venetians constantly on their toes. The Vivaldi Concerto in G minor for two cellos RV531 (with Irene Liebau, the orchestra's principal cellist) was a sumptuous delight, Malov bowing gracefully across his chest on the 'da spalla', as he refers to it. About 30 inches long and hanging from a strap around his neck, the instrument – built by Dmitry Badiarov – gave him the look of a troubadour and spoke with casual virtuosity and a seductive voice reminiscent at times of Bridelli's mezzo-soprano. No wonder Malov styles himself 'Spallenmann' all over his social media.

There were many string-related riches I wished I could have stayed on for, or come earlier to. On 25 June, I would have been able to feast on concerts featuring a trio of violinist Francesca Dego, violist Milena Simović and cellist Laura van der Heijden; the Modigliani Quartet with violist Lise Berthaud and cellist Julian Steckel in Tchaikovsky's *Souvenir de Florence*; and Anne-Sophie Mutter's Virtuosi. Cellist Daniel Müller-Schott and pianist Annika Treutler played together on the day I left (Saturday 1 July), and later in July the Academy of St Martin in the Fields performed Tippett's *Fantasia concertante on a Theme by Corelli*.

On 15 July, the young star violinist María Dueñas and pianist Evgeny Sinaiski performed a recital.

Although the streets and hotels of Bad Kissingen have many fine and friendly restaurants, it could be a challenge to find a place to eat after the concerts. One of the best for almost any time was the Ristorante da Vito am Rosengarten. It is ideal for people-watching with its view of the Regentenbau and the rose garden. More subtle, more gratifying, was the Weinstube Rebstock opposite the Hotel Weisses Haus, reached through a discreetly hidden passageway and open for only a few days each week. It was there that I met the town's music critic and Kissinger Sommer's cultural editor Thomas Ahnert, who warmly recalled the halcyon days when the festival first took flight. A friend from Los Angeles told me he had attended all but the first two editions. I was not surprised. During my stay at Bad Kissingen for Kissinger Sommer, *la dolce vita* could not have been sweeter.

MALOV'S FREELY EXPRESSIVE, IMPROVISATORIAL STYLE HAD THE VENETIANS ON THEIR TOES

ALL PHOTOS JULIA MILBERGER

WITH ONE VOICE

The Leonkoro Quartet: (*l–r*) Jonathan Schwarz, Amelie Wallner, Mayu Konoe and Lukas Schwarz

Formed in 2019, the Leonkoro Quartet burst on to the scene with a string of competition wins and now a debut album. The foursome speak to **Peter Somerford** about what it takes to succeed as a young string quartet today

MAIN PHOTO COURTESY OF THE LEONKORO QUARTET. BORCIANI PHOTO LORENZO PASSONI

After the Leonkoro Quartet's procession of prizes and awards in 2022, its players might be forgiven for seeming to be a little carried away by the speed of their success. In the space of nine months, the group took first prize at major quartet competitions in London and Bordeaux, received richly endowed awards from the Jürgen Ponto Foundation and the Merito String Instruments Trust, joined the BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artists scheme and signed with Impresariat Simmenauer, the German management agency specialising in string quartets. But when I meet the Berlin-based foursome in London in July, they are level-headed, pragmatic and determined in their focus. 'Winning competitions is one thing,' says cellist Lukas Schwarz. 'Now comes the hard part. Every day we have to commit again to what we're doing.'

'The next season is going to be very challenging,' says his elder brother, and first violinist, Jonathan Schwarz. 'We have a lot of big concerts coming up. We're still a very young quartet, but people have certain expectations of us now, and we want to fulfil them.'

As I chat with the two brothers, second violinist Amelie Wallner and violist Mayu Konoe, there's a palpable sense of them soaking up every new experience and opportunity. It's the morning after a return Wigmore Hall concert for the group and the day before a recording session at the BBC. And there's the anticipation of a debut CD release this September – a recording of Ravel and Schumann no.3 on the Mirare label.

The Leonkoro ('Lionheart' in Esperanto) is the most garlanded of the pandemic generation of student quartets, groups that had their conservatoire studies upended, competitions postponed, concerts and freelance opportunities cancelled. Covid hit just a few months after the ensemble formed in 2019. 'In a way, we were extremely lucky because suddenly we had the time to focus on the quartet,' says Jonathan Schwarz. 'When you're studying your instrument, you have so much to do, with your classes, solo studies, orchestra, freelance work. But if you want to pursue chamber music and string quartet playing, you have to put a hundred per cent of your time into it.' Studies with the Artemis Quartet's founder cellist Eckart Runge at the Berlin University of the Arts shifted online, and the group also received remote coaching from Madrid with Günter Pichler, first violinist of the Alban Berg Quartet throughout that group's 38-year life. 'We would send him recordings of our playing and he would listen to them and we'd talk on the phone,' says Wallner.

The Leonkoro Quartet at the Premio Borciani competition in 2021

Following two years of training and preparation, mostly behind closed doors and with just a handful of small concert outings, the Leonkoro's first real exposure came in summer 2021 at the Premio Borciani competition in Italy, where it won second prize (no first prize was awarded) and the audience prize. 'That was a first step,' says Wallner. 'It showed us that if we put all our effort into doing this, we could go in the right direction. But it's not like we could say at that point, or even say now, "OK, now we've done that; in five years we'll have the same security as, say, an orchestral player." Thinking that you might make a career as a quartet is more of an ongoing process. There is a lot of luck involved, and some aspects are out of your control.' A big turning point came in 2022, however, when Jonathan Schwarz quit the Berlin Philharmonic's Karajan Academy, which serves as a training factory for the orchestra. 'From that point it was clear to us that we were going all in,' says his brother.

'It's important to stay realistic,' says Jonathan. 'Our mentor Günter Pichler always says you should follow your heart and dreams, but the reality is that you need to make a living. Orchestras, in Germany at least, pay quite well and they give you stability, and that's great when you like to be at home. But you might not get the same artistic fulfilment as you could from being in a quartet – or the flexibility.' Wallner says that if the quartet doesn't work out, they are all still young enough to be able to go back ▹

The Leonkoro musicians at the Bordeaux competition, where they won first prize

and audition for orchestras or do something else. I counter that everything seems to be working out rather well at the moment.

The players themselves attribute the speed of their initial progress partly to the coincidental sibling factor. The Schwarz brothers have played chamber music together since they were six and eight, developing an innate connection on stage and a complete understanding of each other's sound. Konoe says: 'Everything came quite quickly because the two outside voices already knew how to mix their sound. Amelie and I just had to pull our voices in. That aspect was something we didn't have to work on that much.'

Competitions were already on the group's mind in 2019, being the necessary route today for any young quartet to gain attention in a crowded market. Violinist Schwarz says: 'The first time we met Günter Pichler and were invited to study with him in Madrid, he said something that stuck with me for years: "You must win first prize in a big competition. Otherwise you won't have a chance." He said this and I couldn't believe it at the time. I didn't want to. But now, a few years later, I realise why he said it.' Apart from opening up opportunities for making connections with jury members, agencies and promoters, competitions provide a useful stress test. 'If you can handle the pressure of a competition, then it's likely you can make it through important concerts,' continues Schwarz. 'It's a different kind of pressure, of course, because in a competition you don't have the pressure of needing to make a living out of what you're doing. In competitions it's more about the performance anxiety.' Konoe adds firmly: 'I think anyone who says they're enjoying competitions is lying. You're there to be judged.'

Günter Pichler

Gabriel Le Magadure, violinist with the Ébène Quartet, was on the Bordeaux competition jury in 2022 and says he was struck by the Leonkoro's strength and density of sound, and the players' precision and musical intelligence. 'I recognised a link back to the Alban Berg Quartet. The Alban Berg could be their grandfather and their father could be the Artemis Quartet. They showed they were already on their way professionally: I could have seen a concert from them – that would have been no shock for me, because they looked prepared for a big career.' With the Ébène's experience of winning first prize at the ARD Competition and signing with Simmenauer at a similar stage, Le Magadure can relate to where the Leonkoro finds itself. 'You've proved yourself in competitions, but now it's real life. You suddenly have 100 or 120 concerts a year compared with 10 the year before. It's a different pressure to adapt to, but it's also an amazing time, when you're discovering new people and places. The first two years are a huge deal. When you're invited to play somewhere and you make a good impression, you have a chance to be invited back, and if that happens, you're set.'

> 'GÜNTER PICHLER SAID SOMETHING THAT STUCK: "YOU MUST WIN FIRST PRIZE IN A BIG COMPETITION. OTHERWISE YOU WON'T HAVE A CHANCE"' – *JONATHAN SCHWARZ, VIOLIN*

But Le Magadure sees cracks in the landscape now. We might be in a new golden age in terms of the number and quality of emerging young quartets, but he worries that promoters don't want to take risks with less-established names, particularly after the economic shocks of Covid and cuts to cultural budgets: 'The infrastructure supporting young quartets – excellent organisations like ProQuartet, Le Dimore del Quartetto, the Fondation Singer-Polignac and others – has never been so ▹

BORDEAUX PHOTO PIERRE PLANCHENAULT

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Violin Perpetual Cadenza, Evah Pirazzi Gold – Viola Evah Pirazzi Gold– Cello Perpetual

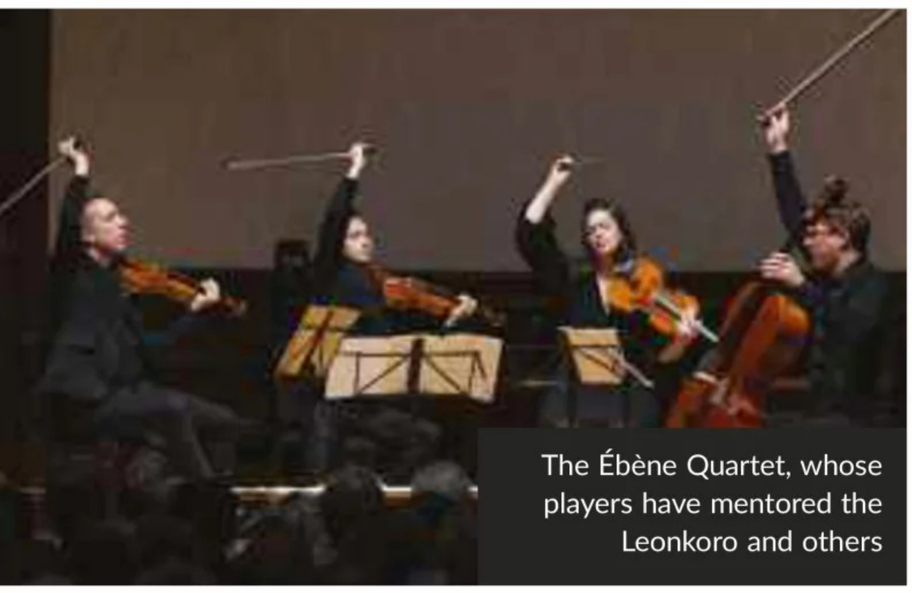
Photo Credit © Nikolaj Lund Photography

strong, and the public seems to be finding the quartet repertoire itself less elitist. But promoters are not taking the new generation as seriously as it deserves. My generation of quartets can do its part to talk to them about this, and maybe managers have a role too, as some of them are scared to take on young quartets. What's incredibly moving for me is to see the young generation, many of whom are already in their late twenties and could have been in orchestras or teaching or in other positions by now, still taking a risk in dedicating themselves to quartet life and fighting for quartet repertoire.'

The challenges of the concert landscape are not lost on the Leonkoro players. 'It's not the greatest and easiest time for a string quartet to survive,' says Lukas Schwarz. 'And it's a shame that so many great young string quartets struggle so much to make a living out of their playing.' His brother contrasts the quartet culture and infrastructure in France with that of his native Germany: 'The French have a fantastic culture of supporting string quartets, and when I talk to young players from France their ideal career is not to be in orchestras. In Germany, it's the opposite. We have fantastic orchestras and it's quite common for people to want to join them.' Wallner adds: 'In Germany, you are so focused on solo studies and how that can help you audition for an orchestra. What we are doing is kind of the exception. Conservatoires do support it, but there's not a big system built around it. The network is smaller.'

Support from mentors and teachers continues to be important for the Leonkoro, even as the quartet's international concert calendar fills up. The group undertakes chamber music studies in Lübeck with former Artemis Quartet violinist Heime Müller alongside making regular visits to Madrid to work with Pichler as well as participating in masterclasses with other groups such as the Ébène Quartet. 'Pichler told us early on that we should teach ourselves by listening,' says Lukas Schwarz, 'to try to step back from the group and listen. But sometimes that's not possible, so having a mentor is like musical group therapy. That other person can bring attention to things that you didn't think were an issue.'

With increasing demands on their time, how do the players balance living in the moment with making plans for the future? One immediate concern is finding a rehearsal space in Berlin. The search for the perfect instrument is more of a long-term thing. Jonathan Schwarz plays on a 1696 Girolamo Amati II violin on loan through ProQuartet, and Wallner plays a Vincenzo Postiglione loaned by a private donor. Lukas Schwarz is trying out a c.1720 Carlo Tononi, previously played by Raphaël Merlin, on loan from Beare's International Violin Society, and Konoe plays her own instrument, 'I have already had the experience of using an old Italian instrument,' says Jonathan, 'but not all of us have. So there's a curiosity in the group about this. Everybody wants to have the chance to play on one of these instruments for a while. But they are very difficult to get hold of, of course.'



The Ébène Quartet, whose players have mentored the Leonkoro and others

The Leonkoro recording in the Teldex Studio, Berlin

'IT'S A SHAME SO MANY GREAT YOUNG QUARTETS STRUGGLE TO MAKE A LIVING' – *LUKAS SCHWARZ, CELLO*

The quartet has no master plan when choosing repertoire. 'We have a list of pieces we want to play and we just pick them out,' says Konoe. 'Nobody has said no to a piece yet.' Lukas Schwarz adds: 'We don't have a focus on a particular composer. We want to play everything, learn everything, because then we can decide on what music we want to explore.' For the group's debut CD for Mirare, which was part of the first prize of the Bordeaux competition, the Leonkoro chose to reflect French connections. The group played the Ravel and Schumann quartets in Paris on its French debut, and had performed the Schumann in the Bordeaux competition. 'It's a conservative programme,' says Jonathan Schwarz, 'but we felt, especially after Covid, that listeners wanted things they were more familiar with.' The quartet tries to play one 20th-century work in most of its concert programmes: Shostakovich's Third Quartet and Janáček's 'Kreutzer Sonata' Quartet are a strong feature of its 2023–4 calendar. The quartet also has its eyes on new music, with part of the Merito award giving it the means to commission a piece from a living composer.

In moments of reflection, how do the players think they've developed as a group in just four years together? 'There's been a lot of change from when we started,' says Lukas Schwarz. 'The way we move together on stage, for example, is more co-ordinated now, more fitting to the music.' (As is the case with the Artemis Quartet, the Leonkoro's violinists and violist stand when performing.) 'Our stage presence is on a different level now, and that speaks of the confidence we've achieved in the last few years.' The development has been at the human level, too, says Konoe: 'I think every string player would benefit from playing in a quartet, because you learn so much about people and how to communicate and work together. It's a business, but at the same time it's so personal.' ●

ÉBÈNE PHOTO SIMON WEIR. TELDEX PHOTO PETER ADAMIK

MORE YOUNG QUARTETS TO WATCH

Barbican Quartet

This London-based quartet won first prize and multiple other prizes at the ARD Competition in September 2022. Its 2023–4 season includes concerts in Germany, Italy, France, the UK, the Netherlands, Canada and the US. Cellist Yoanna Prodanova says: 'In terms of career opportunities, the ARD success encouraged us to keep going with dedicating ourselves to this quartet life, which can be quite challenging at times, and super intense. I don't think any of us could have decided at 15 that we wanted this career, but after finding each other and discovering and exploring the repertoire, we felt the chemistry between us was working so well that there was no going back.'

The quartet is mentored by Günter Pichler in Madrid and the Ébène Quartet in Munich, and has also worked with figures such as violinist Eberhard Feltz and pianist and chamber music professor Ferenc Rados. 'Even when you don't need so much external perspective through coaching, playing with other artists is something that must happen for ever,' says Prodanova. 'It's so important to bring in new perspectives.'

As one of its ARD prizes, the Barbican Quartet will be recording its debut CD for Genuin Classics. The inclusion of Dobrinka Tabakova's *The Ear of Grain* alongside Janáček's String Quartet no.2 ('Intimate Letters') and Schumann's Third Quartet reflects one of the group's aims to play and record pieces by living composers. Prodanova says: 'It's important to us to feel part of the present, as well as going on these profound journeys into the past.'

Chaos Quartet

Prizewinners at the ARD and Bordeaux competitions in 2022, and the Haydn and Bad Tölz competitions this year, the Vienna-based Chaos Quartet was named a BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artist for 2023–5. The group was formed in 2019, and in the same year was selected for the inaugural two-year international ECMAster (European Chamber Music Master) programme, only to have its studies at three conservatoires across Europe relegated to Zoom lessons during the pandemic. 'In a way, it was a blessing,' says cellist Bas Jongen. 'We could rehearse a lot in Vienna, without the stress of travelling to concerts. We used the time to develop our voice, our ideas and interpretations, to focus on our way of working. Now, in hindsight, with a full calendar, that opportunity feels like a blessing in disguise. We didn't need to experiment too much in public.'

Mentored by long-term Artis Quartet violinist Johannes Meissl through the ECMAster programme, the Chaos has studied and worked with quartet artists from across the generations. 'We've worked with living legends such as Valentin Erben and Hatto Beyerle, who turned 90 in June, and we did a postgraduate course with the Casals Quartet, which is still playing a lot,' says Jongen. 'It's important to work with a wide range of different generations and different schools of thought. And there's a whole other group of people who are extremely important to work with, and that's the composers. We had the opportunity to work with Helmut Lachenmann on his Second Quartet, and the late Kaija Saariaho, too.'

Kleio Quartet

First prize winners at this year's Carl Nielsen International Chamber Music Competition, the London-based Kleio Quartet studies with Doric Quartet cellist John Myerscough and Eckart Runge. The group had only just formed when it first played at the Nielsen competition in 2019. 'There was no motive other than "Let's have fun!",' says first violinist Yume Fujise. 'And that still hasn't changed. In a string quartet, the commitment of everyone has to be so strong. And it's not the career path that makes the most money. You truly have to love it, but that's not so hard because the repertoire is so incredible.'

For 2023–5, the Kleio Quartet is part of the pan-European Merita platform, an initiative that aims to boost young quartets' international profiles and develop connections with promoters and concert societies. 'It's difficult in general for promoters to be inviting new artists,' says Fujise. 'And after Brexit, it's harder for London-based quartets to get concerts and exposure in Europe. But we're trying to do as much as we can there.'

Reflecting on the group's journey so far, Fujise says: 'The trajectory of a string quartet is so different from that of a soloist. The beauty of it is that you don't have to be super young and just out of college, and we're in no hurry to reach a final product in our mind. The quartet feels necessary in our lives, and personally there is nothing else I would prefer doing.'

BARBICAN AND CHAOS PHOTOS ANDREJ GRILC. KLEIO PHOTO MATTHEW JOHNSON

Regarded as Norway's national instrument, the Hardanger fiddle is the product of a long evolution beginning in medieval times. **Wiebke Lüders** presents a history of the instrument's development, profiling some of the most notable artisans

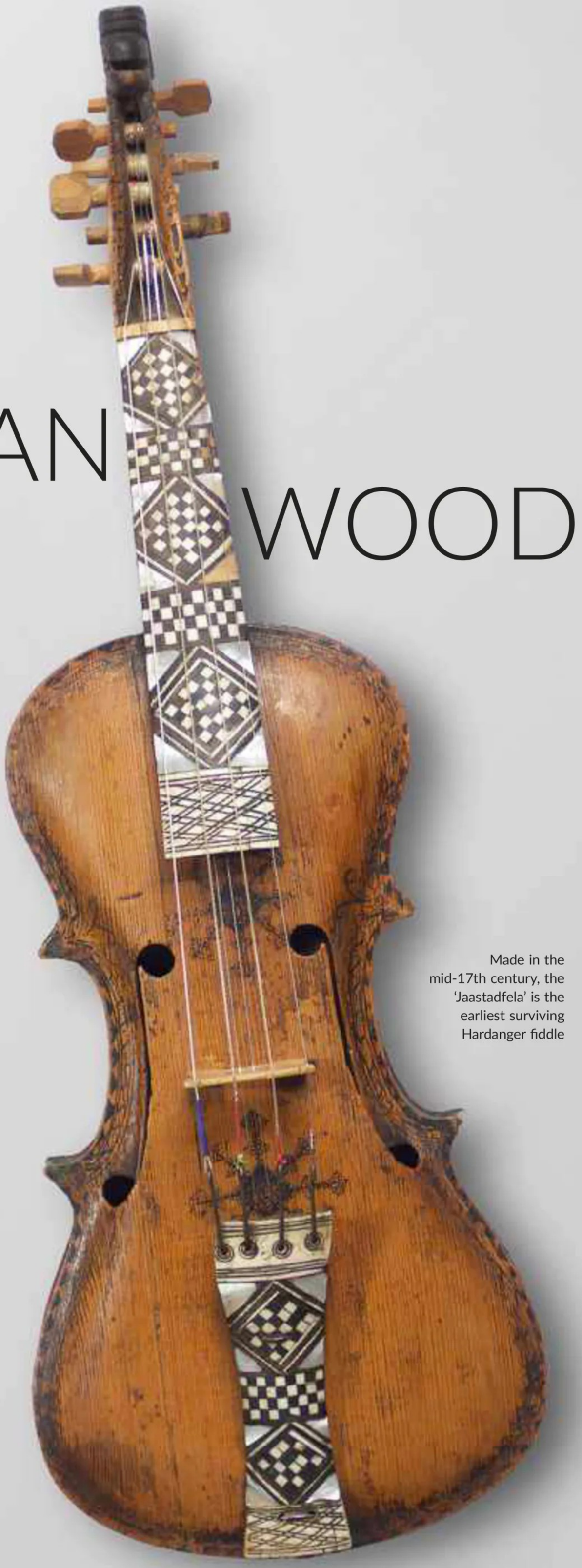
NORWEGIAN WOOD

There is a long and noble tradition surrounding the making of the Hardanger fiddle. Beginning with the earliest known surviving instrument, dated 1651, the fiddle made its way in the 18th century out of the Hardanger region and into the folk music and instrument making traditions of other areas throughout Norway. Often beautifully decorated, this musical instrument with resonance strings is currently gaining great popularity among folk aficionados all over the world.

The earliest extant Hardanger fiddle was very likely made by the lawman **Ole Jonsen Jaastad** (1621–94) who came from Ullensvang in Hardanger, western Norway. In the 1990s a Hardanger fiddle documentation project, led by Bjørn Aksdal, attempted to use radio-carbon dating and dendrochronological analyses of the wood to pinpoint the exact date of its creation. Though these tests proved inconclusive, there is nothing that speaks against the fact that the date 1651 on the label might be correct. But there is also a rather small wooden fiddle case from Voss, dated 1512. This could provide proof that there were small fiddles in western Norway as early as the start of the 16th century.

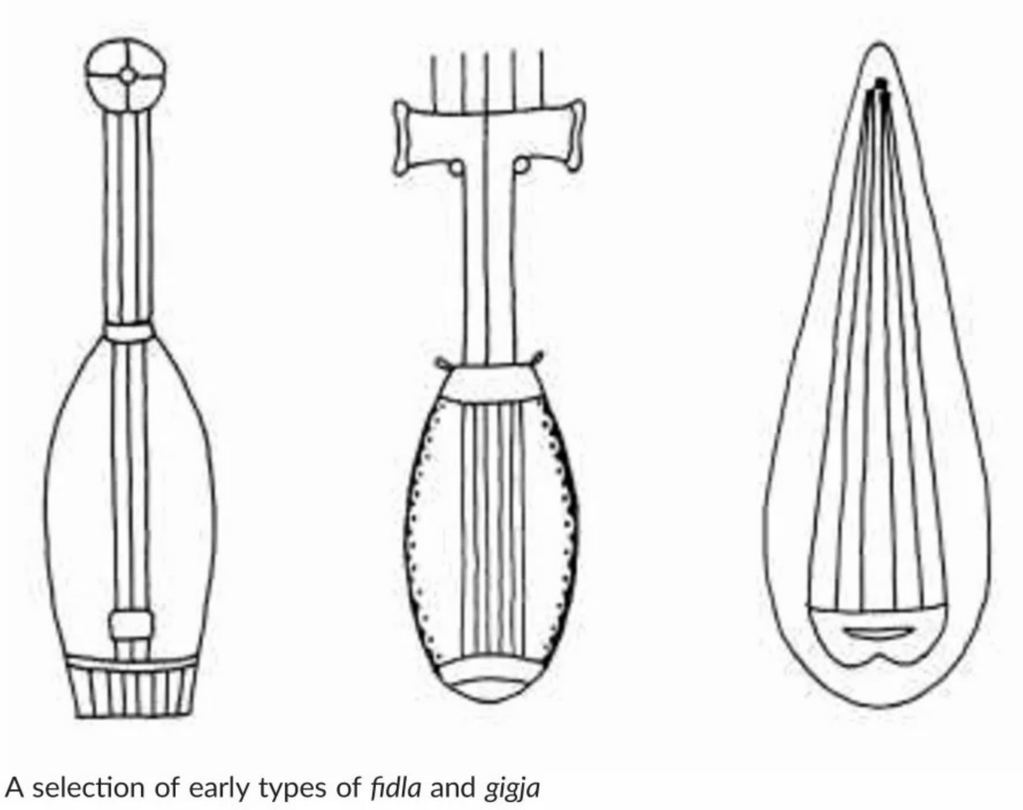
EARLY HISTORY

The roots of the Hardanger fiddle very likely lead back to medieval bowed stringed instruments. The bowed stringed instruments called the *fidla* and *gigja* are mentioned in Old Norse saga literature. The fidla, like the European 'fidel' from c.1500, was probably an oblong box with upright side walls and a flat bottom, with three to five strings. It had no fingerboard and a rather flat bridge. The gigja had two or three strings and must have developed from the medieval rebec, the precursor to the violin. This instrument had an arched bottom and a club- or pear-shaped body without ribs or a separate neck. Some sort of gigja was played not only in Norway but also in England, Iceland and Denmark.



Made in the mid-17th century, the 'Jaastadfela' is the earliest surviving Hardanger fiddle

SVEIN SKARE © UNIVERSITY MUSEUM OF BERGEN



A selection of early types of *fidla* and *gigja*

Medieval fiddles were usually carved from a single block of wood, hollowed out and covered by a wooden soundboard. Both instrument types originated in the Middle East.

There is rather limited archaeological evidence of bowed stringed instruments in Norway. However, an excavation in Novgorod, Russia, unearthed several fragments of two three-stringed fiddles. One of them can probably be dated to the late 12th century, the other one to the 14th. By then Novgorod, founded by Vikings, had become an important centre for the fur trade. It was well connected to Scandinavia during the Viking period and the Middle Ages. This type of fiddle could therefore also have been played in Norway. Similar instruments are known in other areas in Western Europe as well.

During archaeological excavations in Numedal, Eastern Norway, a medieval textile fragment was found, showing an angel playing with a bow on a fiddle-like instrument. Fragments of wall paintings from a stave church in Røldal in Hordaland, western Norway, from about 1100 show a bowed pear-shaped lyre. From the literary sources it seems probable that medieval fiddles of the sort known in Europe were brought to Norway as early as the 12th century, by travelling musicians from foreign countries. Soon the fiddles must have been produced and repaired in Norway as well. The musicians not only played at court, as described in the sagas, but also very likely on local markets among common people. Local woodworkers and musicians could have learnt fiddle making from the itinerant musicians. A kind of peasant fiddle must have evolved from the different Norwegian fiddle types of the Middle Ages; this gradually developed further in the direction of the Hardanger fiddle.

THE MUSICIANS NOT ONLY PLAYED AT COURT, AS DESCRIBED IN THE SAGAS, BUT ALSO VERY LIKELY ON LOCAL MARKETS AMONG COMMON PEOPLE

Early Hardanger fiddles from the 17th and 18th centuries are usually equipped with four melody strings, mainly made of gut, as well as two or four, sometimes six, sympathetic metal strings. In the 19th century four strings were common and 20th-century fiddles have either four or five resonance strings.

RESONANCE STRINGS

But where did the characteristic resonance strings come from? Sympathetic strings were a temporary fashion, which several different European musical instruments underwent. They were first mentioned by Michael Praetorius in his *Syntagma musicum II* from 1619, documenting the use of metal understrings on the 'viol bastarda' of the British Isles. There are several other contemporary literary sources attesting that the first European instruments with resonance strings were made in the British Isles around 1600.

Travelling Arabian musicians from the Middle East or an early type of the Indian *sarangi* might have been important influences. Through the timber trade there was a close contact between the British Isles and western Norway. Around 1650 the centres for the timber trade were in Granvin, Odda, Ullensvang and Ulvik at the Hardanger fjord, just where the Hardanger fiddle first appeared on the scene. It is quite probable that people in the Hardanger region knew about fiddles with resonance strings before 1650 and that is when the small, rounded peasant fiddle acquired its resonance strings.

At this time, Hardanger was not a hidden and inaccessible place. The villages around the Hardanger fjord were easy to reach by boat, and the seaway was a common channel of exchange and communication. The Hanseatic city of Bergen, for instance, had intensive trade connections with many cities in northern Europe and was a meeting point for farmers and foreigners.

THE NORWEGIAN VIOLIN

It is beyond doubt that the violin was also an important influence. The violin probably arrived in Norway as early as the 1600s. It could have been introduced by Norwegian soldiers, who participated in the countless European wars. Apart from Bergen, both Christiania (now known as Oslo) and Trondheim had trade connections to the rest of Europe, and the mining towns of Kongsberg and Røros were in constant exchange with Germany.

There are several sources from the 17th century that tell us about violin playing in Norway. The first violins must have been imported, since there is no evidence of violins being made in Norway before the 18th century. The oldest extant Norwegian violin was made in 1764 by the renowned Hardanger fiddle maker **Trond Isaksen Flatebø** (1713–72) in Botnen, Hardanger. It resembles South German violins of the 18th century.

FIDDLE MAKING IN BOTNEN

In the tiny village of Botnen, northwest of the Hardanger fjord, Hardanger fiddle making had become an important branch of trade at the end of the 17th century. Here the quality of fiddle making reached a remarkably high level. Fiddles made by **Isak Nilsen Botnen** (1669–1759) and his son Trond Isaksen Flatebø were in high demand and ensured a solid income for the fiddle makers and their families. ▹

NORSK HISTORISK LEKSIKON/CAPPELEN AKADEMISK FORLAG

Several oral sources tell of a Danish-speaking foreigner called Austlands-Pål, who settled in Botnen in the 1640s, bringing with him to this little place a German violin that later inspired Isak Botnen to make violins or fiddles himself. Also, the name of the schoolmaster Lars Klark from the British Isles comes up, from whom Isak is said to have learnt to build fiddles. In addition, it is reported that Isak had access to a medieval *fidla* around the 1680s. It is very likely though, that Isak already knew the local peasant Hardanger fiddles, such as the Jaastadfela. Isak's earliest known fiddle is dated 1692. He was a very productive craftsman, and it is quite astonishing that many of his finest fiddles were made after 1750, when he was over 80 years old.

Isak's oldest son was Trond Botnen. There is an often-told story that Isak did not want his son to learn to make or play Hardanger fiddles – but Trond hid above his father's workshop and watched him work through a hole in the floor. Trond was not only a maker of fine fiddles but also a good salesman who sold his instruments at markets for high prices. He is said to have built around a thousand Hardanger fiddles and violins, but only one violin and probably 26 fiddles are preserved. Most of the dated fiddles are made between 1750 and 1765. Trond died in 1772 as one of the richest men in western Norway.

Isak and Trond Botnen both appear to have made violins of the European style, as well as small peasant fiddles with resonance strings and high archings on the top and back plates. Isak's fiddles seem to become bigger, wider and flatter with the years, probably influenced by the shape of the violin. Trond's fiddles are usually a little smaller than those made by his father, with a tendency to become even shorter and narrower over time. From the 1750s onwards he developed the typical 'Trondafele', and around 1760 his fiddles became even higher-arched.

FIDDLE MAKING IN WESTERN NORWAY

Between 1650 and 1800 the Hardanger region was the centre of Hardanger fiddle making. Apart from Isak and Trond, we know the names of at least 13 fiddle makers that worked in western Norway before 1820. Most of their surviving fiddles resemble the Jaastadfela in shape, size and decoration. **Johannes Bårdsen Tveit** (1786–1847) in Samnanger and **Anders Askildsen Heldal** (1811–97) from Hosanger/Bergen based their instruments on Trond's and Isak's fiddles and carried this early fiddle type on to the 20th century. Their fiddles formed the typical West Norwegian model. This represented an alternative to the modern Hardanger fiddle, which was developing in Telemark at the same time. Many fiddle players from western Norway preferred this model, but it did not really spread beyond this area.

THE FIRST EUROPEAN INSTRUMENTS WITH RESONANCE STRINGS MAY HAVE BEEN MADE ON THE BRITISH ISLES AROUND 1600

A c.1750 Trond Botnen fiddle owned by the Ole Bull Academy

Very few early fiddles are preserved from eastern Norway and most of them come from Telemark. The best-known fiddle makers from that city in c.1800 were **Karl Mathiesen Rue** (1742–1829), **Olav Nilssen Gullbekk** (1755–1836) and **John Eriksen Helland** (1790–1862). The size and shape of Karl Rue's fiddles are close to the Jaastadfela, becoming flatter and bigger with time. But Gullbekk's Hardanger fiddles are even smaller than the typical West Norwegian fiddle and appear even more archaic than Rue's fiddles. Helland, from the village of Bø, was probably a student of both Rue and Gullbekk.

However, it was John's son **Erik Johnsen Helland** (1816–68) who initiated the further development of the Hardanger fiddle and brought the supremacy of fiddle making from Hardanger to Telemark. Since his Hardanger fiddle model and decoration style influenced most of the later fiddle makers, he is often called the father of the modern Hardanger fiddle. Together with his brother **Ellev Johnsen Steintjønndalen** (1821–76), in the

WIEBKE LÜDERS

Left An 1890 fiddle by Anders Heldal from the Ole Bull Academy
Right An 1836 Johannes Bårdsen Tveit fiddle, owned by Lars Børje Markegård

1850s and 60s he developed the extremely small and high early Telemark fiddle into a modern instrument that was much closer to the violins of his time. The new fiddle type had a more powerful sound than the earlier fiddles. It was longer, wider and less high, had four resonance strings, a flower and acanthus decoration on the body, and the typical lion's head representing the Norwegian coat of arms.

Erik Johnsen Helland was active at a time of national Romanticism, when in 1849 the legendary fiddle player Myllargutten brought a Hardanger fiddle to a big concert hall for the first time. Hardanger fiddle virtuosos started to travel around Norway and present their instruments in concerts, where they were welcomed with enthusiasm. At that time, when the Norwegian nation was built after more than 400 years of suppression, the Hardanger fiddle was seen as an important symbol of what was genuinely Norwegian. There was a growing awareness and interest in the national cultural heritage and, together with medieval ballads, the Hardanger fiddle became the bearer of the national musical heritage.

In the 1830s Erik gradually took over his father's Hardanger fiddle making business, and by doing so founded a family dynasty that would last about 170 years.

Erik built more than 60 Hardanger fiddles, several violins,

Olaf G. Helland made this fiddle in 1921

HELLAND FIDDLE KRISTOFFER ELIASSEN. OTHER PHOTOS WIEBKE LÜDERS

THE NEW TELEMARK FIDDLE TYPE WAS LONGER, WIDER, LESS HIGH, AND HAD A MORE POWERFUL SOUND THAN THE EARLIER FIDDLES

violas and cellos. Myllargutten owned at least four fiddles made by Erik, and Ole Bull had two. He experimented a lot with different shapes and sizes during his life, starting with a small model and gradually ending up with a bigger and flatter model. In 1862 he received a stipend and worked for ten weeks with the originally Norwegian violin maker Gulbrand Enger in Copenhagen, who had studied in Germany and France and even worked with Vuillaume in Paris. The extent to which Enger influenced Erik's work is not quite clear yet, since Erik had already started to develop his larger fiddle model in 1859.

Erik's brother Ellev developed a bigger fiddle model around 1860 and some of the credit of having developed the modern Hardanger fiddle must go to him as well. After his brother's death, Ellev became the leading fiddle maker in Bø and Telemark. At that time he reduced the size of his fiddles again, and it seems that the best Hardanger fiddle players as well as the older fiddlers preferred Erik's and Ellev's earlier instruments. Soon Ellev's son **Knut Ellevsen Steintjønndalen** (1850–1902) became one of the best fiddle makers in Telemark as well. Many of his high-quality fiddles are still in use today. His son **Knut Knutsen Steintjønndalen** (1887–1969) carried on the family tradition.

Erik Johnsen Helland's son-in-law had become a fiddle maker as well, and took over the fiddle making business in 1880. Under the name **Gunnar Olavson Helland** (1852–1938) he produced many fine Hardanger fiddles. Gunnar's four sons also became fiddle makers: **Knut G.** (1880–1919) and **Gunnar G. Helland** (1885–1976) moved to the United States and opened a Hardanger fiddle workshop under the name 'Helland Brothers' in Wisconsin.

Their renowned brother **Olaf G. Helland** (1875–1946) started to make fiddles early in his life. He soon opened his workshop and a music retail business in Notodden, making Hardanger fiddles as well as violins. His instruments, especially those he made after 1920, are some of the best and most refined Hardanger fiddles to be produced in Norway.

The youngest brother, **John G. Helland** (1897–1977), learnt fiddle making from Olaf and his father Gunnar. From 1917 to 1921 he studied violin making in Sweden, Denmark and Germany, later sharing his knowledge with his brother Olaf. When he returned to Norway and opened his workshop in Skein, he attempted to adapt the sound of the Hardanger fiddle to big, modern concert halls. The fiddle-making dynasty finally came to an end when he died in 1977.

Erik Johnsen Helland's big, violin-like Hardanger fiddle model was rather unpopular for quite some time, but was ▹

AT THE END OF THE 19TH CENTURY THE MODERNISED *TELEMARKSFELA* HAD BECOME STANDARD IN MOST TRADITIONAL FIDDLE AREAS

The decorated backs of three Hardanger fiddles: (*left to right*) by Anders C. Kleven from 1899; an 1867 Erik Johnsen Helland; and an Olaf G. Helland from 1921

ALL PHOTOS KRISTOFFER ELIASSEN

A 1912 fiddle by Gunnar M. A. Røstad

RØSTAD FIDDLE WIEBKE LÜDERS; KLEVEN FIDDLE KRISTOFFER ELIASSEN

THE FIDDLE MODEL DEVELOPED BY HELLAND AND STEINTJØNNDALEN IN THE 1860S IS STILL THE FOUNDATION OF FIDDLE MAKING TODAY

revived in the 1910s by his grandsons **Olaf** and **John**, and **Knut K. Steintjønndalen**. Players now demanded fiddles with a richer and more powerful sound, and which were suited for concerts and *kappleiks* (competitions). At the same time the short, convex fiddle bow was replaced by the modern violin bow, which allowed for more tonal expression.

At the end of the 19th century the modernised *Telemarksfela* had become standard in most of the traditional Hardanger fiddle areas, as well as reaching new Norwegian regions.

FURTHER OUTSTANDING FIDDLE MAKERS

Anders Christensen Kleven (1855–1909) was one of the most outstanding fiddle makers working at the end of the 19th century. As a young man, he spent three years in the United States where he learnt violin making in Chicago and St Paul. Afterwards he established his own fiddle making workshop in Christiania, which had become a centre for fiddle and violin makers in around 1900. During the era of industrialisation, from the middle of the 19th century onwards, many farmers moved to the bigger cities, especially Christiania, and took their peasant culture with them. Kleven's fiddles were inspired by Erik Johnsen Helland's and Steintjønndalen's instruments, but he also developed his own model.

Gunnar M. A. Røstad (1874–1949) is considered by many as the most outstanding fiddle maker of the 20th century. His family had been violin makers for three generations. He was a violinist himself and began to build violins and Hardanger fiddles in his free time. After a while he took an apprenticeship with A.C. Kleven and in 1907 he established his own workshop in Christiania. He admired Erik Johnsen Helland's late fiddles and using Helland's model as a starting point for his own work until 1911. Later he based his fiddles on Italian violins by Stradivari, Guarneri, Santo Serafin and Gagliano, as well as some by French violin makers such as Nicolas Lupot and Michele Deconet. Røstad's fine decorations for the fingerboard, tailpiece and his rose drawings, which are based on A.C. Kleven's work, have become almost standard for later Hardanger fiddle makers.

Anders Kleven's 'Gold Medal fiddle' of 1898

Among the most important Norwegian fiddle makers of the last 50 years that should be mentioned are **Håvard Kvandal** (1910–2005) from Hardanger, a student of Olaf G. Helland and Gunnar M. A. Røstad, as well as **Anders Aasen** (1909–86) in Eidfjord and his student **Sigvald Rørlien** (b.1946) of Voss.

Even though the Hardanger fiddle underwent some slight changes in the 20th century, the fiddle model developed by Helland and Steintjønndalen in the 1860s is still the foundation of fiddle making today. This model has dominated the market for around 160 years, which demonstrates the continuing importance of the two brothers. ●

Baroque violinist and professor Amandine Beyer

A MARRIAGE MADE IN HEAVEN

A string player can miss out on the full potential of their instrument if they don't find the perfect bow to go with it. A host of players and bow makers share their experiences with **Jacqueline Vanasse** and lend advice on the process of searching for the right bow

String players can spend a lifetime trying to find the ideal direct physical connection between their imagination and their instrument. Over time, a player may adapt their instrument, its strings, the soundpost, the bridge height; they might develop the use of their right arm to make it work best with the way that they conceive a phrase. The vital connection here is the bow; when a string player feels they have found the right one, both for them as a player, for their instrument and for the repertoire they happen to be playing, they can then achieve that wonderful fluidity, as if the right hand is speaking and singing. It's little wonder that the bow is often described as directly relating to the breath of a singer.

As a violinist myself, I personally feel that we do not always realise early enough the dramatic differences that the right bow can make in our lives. It was my own mind-blowing encounter with a bow that inspired me to write this article. For 17 years I had been fighting with my 1840 Charles Jacquot violin, until I met my beautiful 1925 Victor Fétique bow, under which the

OSCAR VASQUEZ

Jacquot suddenly became easier to play and revealed a recognisable personality that I began to love for the first time. This relationship between the bow, the instrument and the musician is of paramount importance; it is a *ménage à trois*, so to speak.

But information about bows is not always as readily available as that about violins, and there are several reasons for this. First, there's the question of value, because even the best bows will always be worth less than a great violin, and the highest-value items naturally attract the most interest and attention. Second, historically there has been a lack of direct relationships between bow makers and players.

'The role of the bow maker has often been relegated to the background,' says French bow maker Sylvie Masson. 'Of course, there were a few famous bow makers who had direct contact with musicians, but for a very long time a bow maker would work in the shadow of the violin maker, without even putting their name on their bows. Even today, some people still consider the bow to be an accessory.' Because of this, violinists are not always aware of just how much a bow maker can help improve an existing bow. 'With the bow, people tend to do nothing to it, treating it as if it were a sacred object,' says French bow maker Nelly Poidevin. 'If it doesn't have quite the right camber, or if it shakes in one place, players will usually just try to compensate through their technique. But there is a lot of work that can be done: bows can be straightened, recambered or, in the case of modern models, the balance can be changed with a different trim. The bow has to work along its whole length and adjustments are very important.'

French bow maker Nelly Poidevin in her workshop

MAKING THE BEST START

From the moment a child picks up a violin, their teacher should set aside time to explain the importance of the bow. Often students are only taught the bare minimum about bows and left to figure out the rest by themselves. This can lead to difficulties that could have been avoided with better education.

'We are not often taught the importance of the bow,' says Russian violinist Ilya Gringolts, who plays the 1718 'ex-Prové' Stradivari and has three bows: a François Xavier Tourte, a Helge Netland and a 2022 Markus Fischer. 'I think that for young people it's simply not a priority. Also, students might not be looking beyond themselves, because of this tradition we musicians have of blaming ourselves. If something doesn't sound right or doesn't work, we think the fault must be ours and we just need to work harder. There may be some truth in that, but most of the time finding the right tools can help.'

'The bow has a way of influencing the phrasing and the sound, and of suggesting ideas,' says Amandine Beyer, artistic director of Baroque music ensemble Gli Incogniti and professor of violin at the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis in Switzerland. 'It can inspire the way you play the music. Sometimes, it's not that you have an idea and try to use the bow to implement it; it's that the bow itself offers so much: a different kind of bounce on the string, or an attack or sound that's new.'

When helping a student choose a bow, Beyer herself plays with it too, to demonstrate its potential in different hands: 'I show them how different things could be.'

For Canadian violinist Kerson Leong, it's about variety: 'By trying out more bows, you broaden your horizons. It is a really nice way to discover ideas that you may not have thought of, and these can have musical implications. You can meet a bow that makes you think of the music in a different way.'

Getting the chance to try out the best bows available, even temporarily, can also open a player's imagination to the possibilities of their regular bow and instrument – whatever their level, according to Orion Quartet violinist Todd Phillips, who uses a 2003 Charles Espy bow with his 2004 violin by ▹

> 'WE ARE NOT OFTEN TAUGHT THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BOW. FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IT'S SIMPLY NOT A PRIORITY' – *ILYA GRINGOLTS, VIOLIN*

OLIVIER PONT

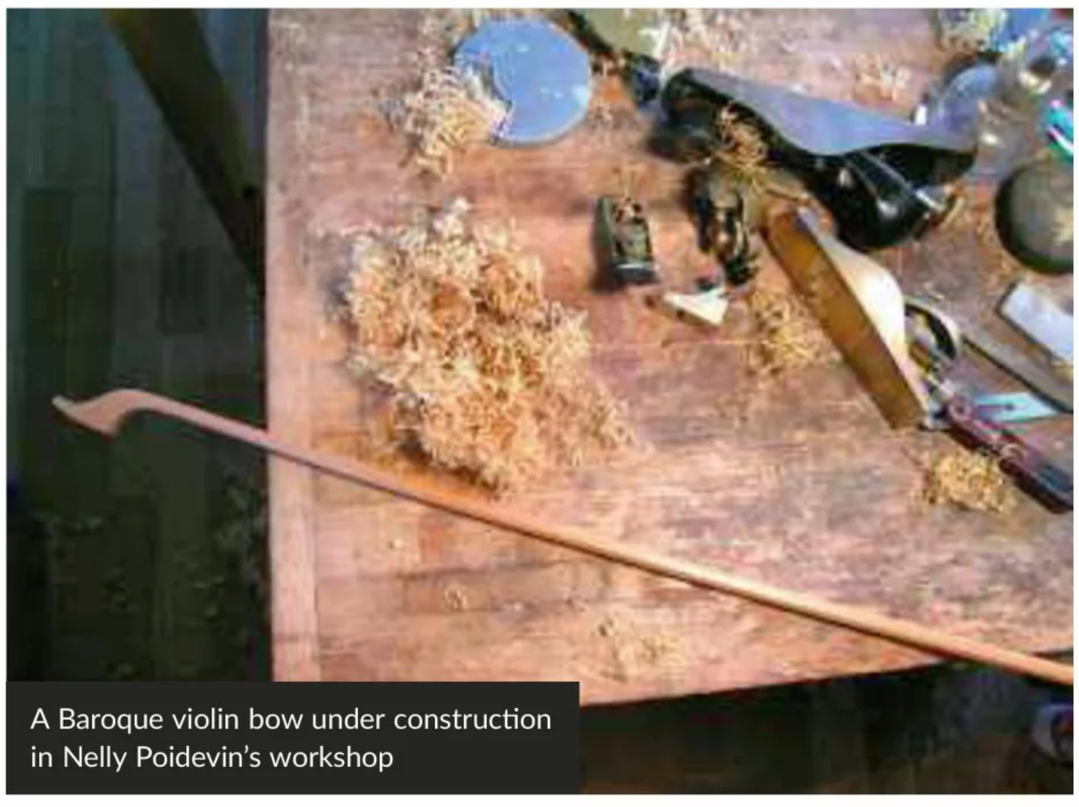
Anne Akiko Meyers performing in 2018 with the 1741 'Vieuxtemps' Guarneri 'del Gesù' and a Tourte bow

Samuel Zygmuntowicz. 'Even if you go back to playing with a bow that's not necessarily the greatest in the world, you end up demanding more from your instrument. It helps you discover how to make a decent violin and bow sound better than their pedigree,' he says. 'If you've never had that opportunity before, how are you supposed to know?' This is good advice for a player who can't afford an expensive bow.

American violinist and faculty member at the Curtis Institute of Music, Benjamin Beilman, who plays the 1740 'Ysaÿe' Guarneri 'del Gesù' agrees with this tactic. 'I tried the most expensive, most wonderful bow I could find, just so that I could understand what potential it might unlock for me.' However, he felt that particular bow – a Tourte – was too fragile for him, and instead settled on another different Tourte, the 1820 'ex-Balaković'. He also has a 2017 Benoît Rolland and a 2020 François Malo. Beilman continues: 'Sometimes, if my students are having bow issues, I will lend them my Tourte to see if it can help with the tone, and inevitably each time it sounds better. It's humbling as a teacher to be reminded that no matter what I say, it is sometimes simply the physical equipment that is the issue.'

'SOMETIMES, IF MY STUDENTS ARE HAVING BOW ISSUES I WILL LEND THEM MY TOURTE TO SEE IF IT CAN HELP WITH THE TONE'
– BENJAMIN BEILMAN, VIOLIN

But no matter how good a bow is, a player always has to master the technique. 'It's not just having a great stick; it's knowing how to use it,' says American violinist Anne Akiko Meyers. 'You may feel that all the colours are there, but you need to know how to get to them. You need to understand the technique in order to use every inch of the bow. The bow arm is everything.'



A Baroque violin bow under construction in Nelly Poidevin's workshop

AN OBJECT OF SUBTLETY

During the Baroque era, each bow had its own individual shape and weight and players would pick the tool they wanted for a certain sound, a certain effect, or for specific repertoire. In contemporary times, bows have become more standardised, but they can still offer a wealth of possibilities. 'It may not seem like it,' says Masson, 'but the bow is an object of subtlety ▹

BOW PHOTO OLIVIER PONT

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‘THE TWO OBJECTS – VIOLA AND BOW – FOUND EACH OTHER. AN INSTRUMENT IS WORTH NOTHING WITHOUT THE RIGHT BOW. IT’S LIKE A MARRIAGE’ – *ANTOINE TAMESTIT, VIOLA*

that’s hard to imagine. Even the same horsehair mounted by different bow makers on the same bow may give different results. Like the performer, bow makers have their own interpretations of a project.’ A player can find an unlimited source of inspiration in what that suggests.

Sometimes the bow not only enhances the instrument but turns out to be the missing link. French violist Antoine Tamestit struggled to feel comfortable playing his 1672 ‘Mahler’ Stradivari viola, and a luthier suggested that he find a good bow that would work well with it. It was by chance that he came across an 1835 Nicolas Maire bow. ‘It was like a key,’ he says. ‘It opened up the harmonics, the resonances and the vibrations of my instrument. Not that things were resolved overnight, but from one day to the next the instrument opened up, and over the following months and years it evolved, with ups and downs, but always on an upwards trajectory. That’s what it took to enable me to understand my viola and play it properly. The two objects – viola and bow – found each other. An instrument is worth nothing without the right bow. It’s like a marriage, a pairing that works according to very precise properties of vibrations and colours.’

For violist Antoine Tamestit, finding the right bow was like a key to unlocking his instrument

Leong, who plays the 1741 ‘ex-Bohrer, Baumgartner’ Guarneri ‘del Gesù’ violin, had a similar experience: ‘Finding my 1845 Dominique Peccatte bow changed my relationship with my violin. Before, we used to fight quite a bit because I wasn’t able to unlock its chest voice, the substance – go deep into the bone, the marrow. This bow really seems to get to the bottom of the violin and allows me to do it without forcing. Somehow, my bow changed my entire playing, and that is the thing with bows: you don’t know how far you can go until you find the one that takes you to a totally different level.’ Leong also owns a 2010–11 François Malo bow which he keeps for ‘those instances where I don’t need as much of a high-powered muscular bow and am looking for a little bit more in terms of fine articulation and control. It might not draw as special a sound as the Peccatte, but I keep it in my case because it is always reliable.’

This relationship between bow, violin and player is a delicately balanced one that, like human relationships, more often than not depends on chemistry and serendipity. Meyers performed on several Stradivaris before moving on to the 1741 ‘Vieuxtemps’ Guarneri ‘del Gesù’, at which point she found that she needed a different bow. She likens trying out bows to speed dating. ‘You need to see quickly what all the great facets are, the pros and the cons. When you find the one, it’s almost instantaneous. It’s like complete love from the beginning.’ She tried many different bows (‘and I am a Tourte collector – always have been’) before finally finding the right match: a Tourte formerly owned by Benno Rabinof. ‘I could tell right away from the first sound, even just one note. I never knew my violin could sound this way and it’s so inspiring and so exciting. You want to play everything as you can’t believe what is happening. Yes, it’s like a marriage partner.’

In Poidevin’s opinion, the meeting between player and ideal bow is one that is based more on chance than design. ‘I don’t know if I’d be able to make a bow on request that would suit both an instrument and an instrumentalist,’ she says. ‘The meeting of a bow and a musician is simply an encounter, and I have the impression that you can’t force the marriage. Musicians may need to work on their instrument to get the most out of it, but I don’t think that for a bow they need to go through that phase. It either happens, or it doesn’t.’

FIRST PRINCIPLES

With such a dizzying array of choices, how does a player navigate finding the best bow for that suits them? For American violinist Stefan Jackiw, who plays a 1704 Vincenzo Rugeri violin with a François Nicolas Voirin bow, the instrument comes first. ‘A violin is generally a bigger purchase than the bow, in terms of price,’ he says. ‘It makes sense to start with a blank slate and then find a bow that both brings out the good qualities and compensates for the negative qualities of a violin.’

The instrument has its own personality and it can light up differently depending on the bow used; this can make a huge

JULIEN MIGNOT

Violinist Stefan Jackiw loves the responsiveness of his Voirin bow

difference in bringing out the instrument's potential. 'Sometimes players feel they need to change their instrument, but they don't have the budget,' says Masson. 'By changing their bow instead, they can improve their instrument quickly and relatively cheaply.'

Most musicians choose a bow for the intrinsic sound it produces in contact with the strings, rather than its acrobatic capabilities. However, it's essential to take a bow's flexibility into consideration. 'In the end, what you want is a well-rounded bow, one that can make a certain type of sound,' says Phillips. 'You want to have that flexibility; the bow has to respond to your impulses. It doesn't just magically do things on its own.'

Jackiw adds: 'In my experience, the softer the wood of the stick, the more nuance of sound and variety of colours you can find, but the harder it is to control. I have tried many bows that feel quite solid and tough compared with mine, and easier to control, but I would get bored with the sound of such reliable bows. I guess it's a trade-off.' Jackiw's precious Voirin bow infamously broke during a concert in May 2023, but it has subsequently been fully restored.

'I WOULD ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO GO WITH THE BOW THAT BRINGS OUT THE MOST FROM THE INSTRUMENT, RATHER THAN WHAT FEELS COMFORTABLE'
– IDA KAVAFIAN, VIOLIN

SOPHIE ZHAI

How about how comfortable a bow feels in the hand? Violinist, violist and teacher Ida Kavafian says, 'I would encourage people to go with the bow that brings out the most from the instrument, rather than going for what you might like or what feels comfortable. You don't want a bow to be limited in what it is able to do. My own bow really does exaggerate and enhance the qualities that I already loved in my violin. It's better to go outside your comfort zone to find the thing that you might be missing. As a teacher, I hope I can bring out the personalities of my students in their playing and make them the best at being themselves. It's a similar relationship to that between a violin and a bow.'

A MAGIC WAND

In conclusion, the bow gives life to the instrument. It provides the weight, the speed, the aerodynamics, the soul of the sound. For some, the bow is indeed like a singer's breath: 'The correlation between how deeply you engage the string and how fast or slow you pull against it, and how you settle little touches with the small muscles in your hand to imitate all the different things we do naturally with the voice,' says Phillips. 'That is all in the bow; it's not the left hand.'

For others, the bow is to the violin as the paintbrush is to the painter, or the knife to the sculptor. 'The bow I use feels like it is chiselling the sound,' says Meyers. 'It's like Michelangelo with a block of marble.' And for others still, it is simply a magic wand. 'It's like the wands in Harry Potter; a bow very personal to you is where all the magic lies,' says Leong. 'It's enigmatic because the individual qualities of how it responds throughout a basic stroke are too many to quantify and specify, and yet you know pretty much from the first moment whether or not you'll click with a bow.' ●

LOOKING FOR THE LIGHT

The young Swedish violinist Johan Dalene speaks to **Tom Stewart** about recording his fourth album, a recital of luminous, Neoclassical 20th-century music for violin and piano

Violinist Johan Dalene's latest album, *Stained Glass*, takes its name from the final track, a short, luminous piece by Polish composer Grażyna Bacewicz (1909–69). A contemporary of Britten, Messiaen and Shostakovich, Bacewicz is still little-known to many listeners in the UK. That's a shame, because her bright, bold music more than holds its own in a crowded field – but, as with any unfamiliar composer, it can be hard to know where to start. This new album, which features four works by Bacewicz alongside more familiar ones by Ravel, Prokofiev and Arvo Pärt (and the briefest of appearances of music by Lili Boulanger), would be a great place to begin one's explorations.

'I had played some Bacewicz before but went looking for more for this disc,' Dalene tells me by Zoom from his home in Stockholm. 'She was a violinist and wrote so much for the instrument, so there's lots to discover.' Bacewicz, who was leader of the Polish Radio Orchestra from 1936–8, penned *Stained Glass Window* (*Witraż* in the original Polish) in 1932, the year she graduated from the Warsaw Conservatory. Alongside this brittle, beautiful miniature, the disc features three others from later in the composer's career: *Humoreska*, *Kołysanka* (Lullaby) and *Taniec słowiański* (Slavonic Dance). Though written 20 years later, they sound almost naive compared with the earlier piece's experimental lyricism. 'I was drawn to *Witraż* before I even knew what the word meant,' says Dalene.

'I WANTED TO TRY NEW REPERTOIRE – NEOCLASSICAL MUSIC I REALLY LOVE' – *JOHAN DALENE*

'There was just something about it. It was so different from the others.'

Since winning the Carl Nielsen International Competition in 2019, Dalene has released three other albums on BIS. The first featured the Tchaikovsky and Barber concertos with the Norrköping Symphony Orchestra (the Barber also featured in his BBC Proms debut last year). Next came *Nordic Rhapsody*, an all-Scandinavian recital with pianist Christian Ihle Hadland, also his partner on this latest recording. 'That programme introduced me to music I hadn't come across before,' Dalene says, 'There was one composer from each of the Scandinavian countries, except Iceland, and it was the first time I'd played anything by Rautavaara.' Then there were the Sibelius and Nielsen concertos with the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra and conductor John Storgårds. 'It felt natural to record pieces I'd played a lot and that come from the same place I do. But for this new disc I wanted to try new repertoire – Neoclassical music I really love.'

Before the Bacewicz come two big beasts of early 20th-century repertoire in which Dalene clearly feels so at home. First comes Ravel's sparkling Violin Sonata in G major, with its long, fluid lines, bluesy strumming and effervescent finale. Then there's Prokofiev's punchy Violin Sonata no.2, originally written for piano and flute. 'Both have a Neoclassical spirit but they each have their own language and their own things to say,' Dalene explains. 'They have the expression in common. There's a flowing, almost impressionistic sound and that's the thread between them I wanted to bring out in the recording. The challenge is always to find a special sound for each composer and to bring out the things that make their music special,' he continues. 'If you take the last movement of the Prokofiev, you need to use much less bow than you would in the Ravel, for example, where the lines are longer and you want create that flowing feel.'

Dalene says he has always looked up to Hadland: 'He's a genius really,' he says. 'Not just as a musician but his mind.

ALL PHOTOS MATS BÄCKER

Johan Dalene and Christian Ihle Hadland at the sessions in Stockholm's Konserthuset

He knows every football player in every team from every period. You can ask him who played in a particular match 20 years ago and he knows it!' Dalene is a fellow football fan. The pair have been performing together since 2019, when Dalene was only 18. 'The Nordic recital disc was one of the first things we did as a duo. It was a fantastic experience.'

Stained Glass was recorded in the Grünewald hall of Stockholm's Konserthuset, a striking ice-blue building that is home to the city's principal orchestra, the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic. The Grünewald hall is renowned for its clear, mellow sound. 'It's such a beautiful space with an acoustic to match,' Dalene says, explaining that the duo were joined by producer Jens Braun, another regular collaborator. 'He brings such good energy to the room and I know I can always trust what he says.'

Reflecting on his experiences across the four albums he has released so far, Dalene explains that it always takes him some time to get into the flow of the recording process. 'The first few hours you spend just warming up, finding your sound,' he says. 'For this disc, the time I needed to get the feel of the music was different for each piece. We tended to play through all of them a couple of times, though, which helped me to clarify my ideas.' After this, Dalene and Hadland recorded edits and re-takes in long, uninterrupted sections. 'The music gets fragmented otherwise,' he says. 'You risk losing the identity of the piece.'

Although Dalene's 23rd birthday came shortly after we spoke, it's clear he's still an artist looking for the music that really makes him tick. Does he ever feel like more experienced voices try to press their ideas on to him? 'I'm open to taking advice and direction from other people, of course!' he laughs. 'I know how I want to play my instrument though and I know how I want my recordings and performances to sound.' For example, he says, a good producer should be just like Braun: 'Jens listens to things like sound and intonation and these are the things that really help the quality. Of course he has great musical ideas too, but he's open-minded and focused on making sure things are the best they can be. We're following where the music takes us together.'

Producer Jens Braun (*right*) in the studio with Hadland and Dalene

WORKS **Pärt** Fratres **Ravel** Violin Sonata in G major **L. Boulanger** Nocturne **Prokofiev** Violin Sonata no.2 in D major op.94a **Bacewicz** Humoresque; Lullaby; Slavonic Dance; Stained Glass Window
ARTISTS **Johan Dalene (violin) Christian Ihle Hadland (piano)**
RECORDING VENUE **Grünewaldsalen, Konserthuset Stockholm, Sweden**
RECORDING DATES **14–16 November 2022**
CATALOGUE NUMBER **BIS-2730**
RELEASE DATE **6 October 2023**

Casals in the crypt of Sant Miquel de Cuixà, France, in 1950

To mark the 50th anniversary of the death of Pablo Casals in October 1973, **Oskar Falta** examines the great Catalan cellist's 'rediscovery' of the Bach Cello Suites, and the continuing legacy of his highly personal approach to the music

Journey to a MASTERPIECE

YOUSUF KARSH

'You play Bach your way, I'll play him his way,' concluded the celebrated harpsichordist Wanda Landowska after a discussion she had with Pablo Casals. Looking back at Casals' interpretation of Bach's Cello Suites BWV1007–12 and how he brought these works into the limelight, could we come to a closer understanding of what really was *his* way?

Casals first came across an edition of the Cello Suites in Barcelona in 1890, when he was 13 years old. Owing to the absence of musicological research at the time and several biographers' blind trust in Casals' word, the story surrounding the discovery contains some apocryphal elements. 'Suddenly I came upon a sheaf of pages, crumbled and discoloured with age,' he recalled in Albert E. Kahn's book *Joys and Sorrows: Reflections by Pablo Casals* (1970). Along the same lines, Robert Baldock's 1992 biography of Casals describes his find as 'battered', and Eric Siblin in his popular volume *The Cello Suites* (2009) gives an account of the score being discovered amid 'musty bundles of sheet music', portraying its cover as 'tobacco-coloured'. These sources give such a strong and mysterious impression of antiquity, as if Casals had just chanced upon the long-lost manuscript in Bach's own hand. And yet, if the score was in such a miserable state, age was not the cause, as it was published only 24 years previously.

Casals aged twelve

Unfortunately for Casals, what he had found was an 1866 'concert' edition of the Cello Suites by the German cellist Friedrich Grützmacher (as first reported in 1962 in Joan Alavedra's *Pau Casals*). Grützmacher is infamous for having taken remarkable liberties in editing works of great composers. Some of his alterations included additional chords, completely recomposed passages, alternative endings, added dynamic and glissando markings and, last but not least, the Sixth Suite transposed from D to G major. The extent of Grützmacher's musical vandalism left some of the movements edited beyond recognition (Casals' own first copy is now on display in the Pau Casals Museum on Sant Salvador beach, El Vendrell, Spain).

Apparently, Casals was also not the first cellist to perform an entire Bach suite in public (a fact long known to researchers), as he liked to claim: 'Before I did, neither violinists or violoncellists had ever played a suite in its entirety' (Josep Maria Corredor: *Conversations with Casals*, 1956). Casals' oft-repeated astonishment that these works were known neither to his teacher José García nor to anyone else in his circle didn't mean that they were unknown universally. At the turn of the 20th century, Barcelona lagged far behind other European centres when it came to classical music.

In fact, from the publication of the first edition of the Cello Suites in Paris in 1824 (a century after their conception) until 1890, when Casals first learnt of their existence, they had been not only edited and published repeatedly but also performed. A number of 19th-century cellists played an entire Bach suite in concert: Grützmacher in 1867, Alfredo Piatti in 1873, and Julius Klengel in 1894 and 1904, according to George Kennaway's summary. Casals himself started including a complete suite in his concert programmes in around 1902. By then, he must have long realised his Grützmacher score was a cheat, especially if he got his hands on other, less modified editions in the meantime (to Grützmacher's credit, he also made another, more conservative version around 1867).

Actually, according to the cellist Colin Hampton (1911–96), Casals' favourite edition was Robert Hausmann's (1898). He had also known Anna Magdalena Bach's manuscript, since it was printed in Diran Alexanian's analytical edition in 1929. If Casals neither discovered the Cello Suites nor gave their premiere performance, he was indeed the first cellist to record them. Although he had already recorded a selection from the Third Suite as early as 1915 in New York, his true masterpiece was his recording of the entire set, created in London and Paris between 1936 and 1939.

The first complete Bach Suites recording was made in three instalments under tragic historical circumstances. Casals' homeland, Spain, was already in the midst of civil war when he started recording, and by the time he'd finished, the Second World War was looming on the horizon. On top of all this, Casals was not particularly fond of recording and reportedly hated the microphone, which he called the 'steel monster'. The first recording sessions (suites nos.2 and 3) took place in London in November 1936. Around the same time, the British government refused to deliver arms to Spanish anti-Franco republicans, an act that made Casals reluctant to return to England to continue the recording process.

A recording of the entire set of suites may never have seen the light of day were it not for Casals' student and friend Maurice Eisenberg (1900–72), who was based in Paris at the time and who in 1968 recalled, 'I took the bull by the horns and asked Mr Fred Gaisberg, the record executive, if he would consider moving all the bulky and expensive equipment to Paris.' ▹

Casals playing the cello at Montserrat Monastery, Barcelona, Spain, in 1934

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And so the Bach marathon could resume with suites nos.1 and 6 in the French capital in June 1938. Recording conditions at that time were far from ideal: each side of a 12-inch 78rpm disc had about 4–5 minutes of recording time available, and although splitting a movement between two or more disc sides wasn't uncommon, Casals left out some of the repeats. Moreover, every movement had to be recorded in one take, without the possibility of cuts or further editing.

With two suites left to record, times weren't getting any brighter: Casals was in Barcelona while the city was being captured, and he escaped to France by the skin of his teeth. The lack of news from his family in Spain left him worried, and witnessing the misery of war refugees, whom he aided on the other side of the border, made him feel no better. How Casals managed to gather the force to record the rest (suites nos.4 and 5) is beyond comprehension – but he did so in June 1939, again in Paris. The set was issued on 78rpm discs by the Victor label in three instalments (in 1940, 1941 and 1950 respectively), but the LP records weren't released until 1957. Casals wasn't quite satisfied with the result – owing to technical flaws of the recording technology, he found that the sound lacked the dynamism and variety of a live performance. This is why he enjoyed hearing his records played faster. 'He did not mind too much if, owing to the higher speed, the works sounded roughly a minor 3rd too high, to him it was more important to regain the lost liveliness,' remembered the Swiss cellist Rudolf von Tobel (1903–95) in the introduction to his edition of the Bach Cello Suites based on Casals' interpretations (published in 2004 by Carus Verlag).

> WHILE CERTAIN ASPECTS OF CASALS' PLAYING STYLE AND INTERPRETATION MIGHT APPEAR ANACHRONISTIC TODAY, OTHERS STILL HOLD WATER

From 1936 onwards, von Tobel studied the Bach Suites with Casals literally measure by measure and kept notes pedantically. While certain aspects of Casals' playing style and interpretation observed by von Tobel might appear somewhat anachronistic today, others still hold water – in particular, certain features of his left-hand technique. According to von Tobel, Casals generally favoured open strings and lower positions in Bach. In permanent search of left-hand relaxation, he chose his fingerings accordingly. For example, he might prefer a harmonic to a stopped note; thus, by taking advantage of the resonance overlap, he gained extra time for release and preparation of the hand for the subsequent position. Casals' employment of extensions was an effective means of shift avoidance. He used stretches not only between fingers 1 and 4, ▸

Swiss cellist Rudolf von Tobel with Casals in Prades, France, in 1947

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE PAU CASALS FOUNDATION

Casals teaching in Zermatt in 1955. Von Tobel is on the right

Casals teaching the young Miklós Perényi in Zermatt in 1965

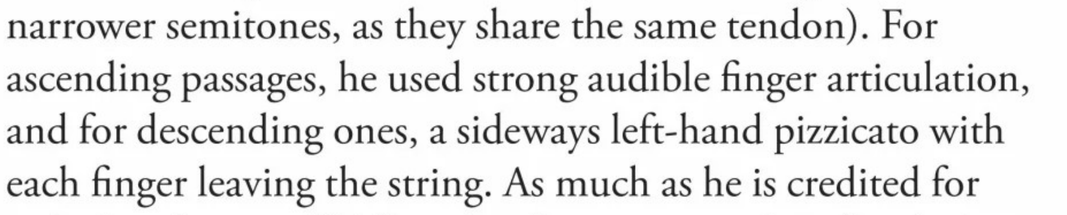
spanning an interval of a 4th (on the same string) or an octave (across two neighbouring strings), but also between 1 and 2, beyond the usual whole-tone extension, applying the same spider-like principle to spans between fingers 2 and 4. For repeated notes played with the same finger, Casals would lift up the finger each time (where applicable) before quickly placing it anew, which proved to be an efficient tension-release device.

In general, he preferred using stronger fingers to weak ones and avoided trills with 3 and 4 – instead, he often used 2 and 3, in favour of expressive intonation (these two fingers allow for narrower semitones, as they share the same tendon). For ascending passages, he used strong audible finger articulation, and for descending ones, a sideways left-hand pizzicato with each finger leaving the string. As much as he is credited for reducing the use of bidirectional portamento in cello playing, there were occasions when Casals indulged in fervent glissandos as if there were no tomorrow.

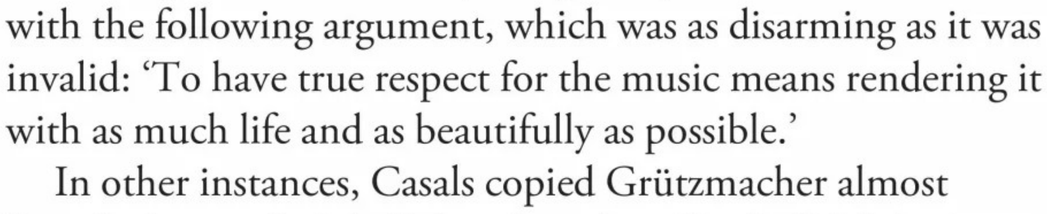
But how does Casals' rendition of Bach sound to today's ear? Stravinsky blamed him for 'playing Bach in the style of Brahms'. On his recording, some movements do indeed sound more Brahmsian than others (for example, the Prelude and Gigue from the Fifth Suite), while some (the Third Suite's Courante, for one) would almost meet today's expectations. Let's also bear in mind that Casals' cello set-up was surprisingly close to 'Baroque', as he played on gut strings all his active musical life. In his approach to Bach's musical text, Casals was less heretical than Grützmacher, but traces of the latter's influence are apparent especially in the first three suites. Although it appeared in earlier pre-Grützmacher editions, one such example is Casals' syncopated articulation in the Gigue of Suite no.1 (**example 1a**). Casals defended it with the following argument, which was as disarming as it was invalid: 'To have true respect for the music means rendering it with as much life and as beautifully as possible.'

In other instances, Casals copied Grützmacher almost literally (**example 2a**). Other than that, Casals didn't hesitate to add a few chords or double-stops, or to change a note here and there (whether out of conviction or convenience), and while he adopted some of Anna Magdalena Bach's bowings, he discarded others as 'unplayable'.

Naturally, the legend of Casals hasn't left younger generations indifferent. Although he never held a permanent teaching position, he always generously shared his ideas with



EXAMPLE 1a Bach Cello Suite no.1 in G major BWV1007, Gigue opening bars as heard on Casals' 1938 recording



EXAMPLE 1b Corresponding bars as transcribed from Anna Magdalena Bach's manuscript, for comparison

EXAMPLE 2a Bach Cello Suite no.2 in D minor BWV1008, Allemande bars 3–4 as edited by Grützmacher in 1866 and recorded by Casals in 1936

EXAMPLE 2b Corresponding bars as transcribed from Anna Magdalena Bach's manuscript, for comparison

PHOTOS A. PERREN-BARBERINI. MUSICAL EXAMPLES OSKAR FALTA

young players. In the 1920s, he gave annual masterclasses at the École Normale de Musique de Paris and taught a few select private students during his exile in Prades. The next such opportunity didn't arise until 1952, the year that saw the inauguration of the Zermatt Summer Music Academy, which ran until 1965. Set in the idyllic Swiss Alpine resort, each annual edition welcomed around fifty international participants and countless auditors (including Casals' friend Queen Elisabeth of Belgium). In a local newspaper interview (quoted in Helga Váradi's *Le maître et le centimaître*, 2021), Casals spoke of the academy's higher purpose: 'The student should learn not only how to play better, but also how to become a better human being.' Anna Shuttleworth (1927–2021), who attended the classes in 1954, remembered the lessons fondly: 'Casals always made encouraging remarks before making other suggestions to improve the performance.'

However, some participants were not at ease with the sycophantic atmosphere in Zermatt. 'There seemed to be a real cult of adulation,' recalled violinist Alexander Schneider (1908–93) in his unpublished memoir 'Sasha' (1988). In spite of himself, the cellist in his later life became a sort of a musical guru, as the young and rebellious Jacqueline du Pré – who 'was not comfortable with the aura of saintliness that surrounded Casals' – noticed in 1960 (Elizabeth Wilson, *Jacqueline du Pré: Her Life, Her Music, Her Legend*, 1999). Von Tobel took minutes of the classes, and 'would immediately write down whatever Casals said whenever he opened his mouth', recalled Schneider, before going on: 'At one point during the lesson, Casals stopped a student and said, "No, no, no, this is wrong – you have to do this and this." Right away, von Tobel stood up and said, "Master, just now you said the contrary about what this same student played last year." Casals answered, "That was last year."' A masterclass setting can often turn into an enforcement on students of the teacher's own interpretation; nevertheless, in his address to the participants, Casals would remain open-minded: 'You have to take the responsibility for your performance and are under no obligation to do something just because I said it. But I have always spoken from the heart in my hope of helping you' (as recalled by von Tobel in his edition of the suites).

In his Bach interpretations, Casals represented both a catalyst and an inhibitor to progress, as it was difficult to escape his influence and avoid emulation for decades to come. He wasn't open to ideas of historically informed practice and called anyone who didn't share his own opinion a 'purist'. In an attempt to protect Casals from critique by the emerging early music movement, authors like von Tobel or David Blum (*Casals and the Art of Interpretation*, 1977) implied that by pure intuition Casals came to the same conclusions as 18th-century theorists such as Johann Joachim Quantz or Leopold Mozart, whereas in fact he was reformulating perennial musical knowledge. Casals' celebrity – augmented by several extramusical factors, like the dawn of recording and radio, his political activism and his marriage to a much younger former student – reached international stardom in his later life and unfortunately partly eclipsed other great cellists who came both before and during his lifetime. Nevertheless, one thing is sure: there will always be Bach Cello Suites *before* and *after* Casals.

Now, 50 years after Casals' passing, cellists are still adding their share to the sky-scraping pile of recordings of the Bach Cello Suites. More often than not limited by self-imposed restrictions (be it the idealistic pursuit of authenticity or the necessity to use appropriate historical equipment), have we perhaps come full circle so that we could once more take a leaf out of Casals' book, enjoy certain liberties and get inspired by *his* way? Casals once said: 'Sometimes it is better not to play the way it is written down,' or, to put it more bluntly, in the words of the American jazz musician Miles Davis: 'Don't play what's there, play what's not there.' ●

THE CASALS LEGACY

The Pau Casals Foundation is a private, non-profit organisation created by Pablo and Marta Casals in 1972. Its aim is to preserve and disseminate Casals' artistic and humanitarian legacy, support young cellists and encourage projects promoting the values he stood for throughout his life on behalf of peace, human rights and social commitment.

The Pau Casals Museum (*right*) is located in Casals' summer house on the beachfront of Sant Salvador, in the municipality of El Vendrell, Spain. It became his habitual residence from the 1920s onwards. Casals lived there until the end of the Spanish Civil War in 1939, before he went into exile. The museum presents an interactive, dynamic and participatory experience that explains the figure of Casals in all his dimensions as a musician as well as reinforcing the humanitarian side of his legacy. For more information, visit www.paucasals.org

CASALS PHOTO VYTAS VALAITIS. MUSEUM PHOTO COURTESY OF THE PAU CASALS FOUNDATION

The Strad Calendar 2024 pays tribute to one of the 20th century's finest stringed instrument collections, put together in just a couple of decades by American violin collector David L. Fulton. **Christian Lloyd** examines the treasures

THE FULTON COLLECTION

In 1981, US software engineer David L. Fulton bought his first fine instrument, a 1698 violin made by Pietro Guarneri of Mantua. It cost $120,000, a vast sum to him at the time, 'more than the value of my house'. However, it led to a passion for collecting fine instruments, specifically old Italians, and over the next two decades the collection grew to become possibly the 20th century's finest owned by an individual. The vast majority of the priceless treasures have now been sold on, but nevertheless the Fulton Collection was last year immortalised in the form of a book, in which the collector gives a guided tour of the 28 instruments he owned: 18 violins, 6 violas and 4 cellos. Antonio Stradivari and Giuseppe Guarneri 'del Gesù' put their names to 8 instruments apiece, while master luthiers such as Carlo Bergonzi, G.B. Guadagnini, Vincenzo Rugeri and Domenico Montagnana were also represented.

The Strad Calendar 2024 brings together 12 of these extraordinary instruments, described below with comments by Fulton and others.

It might seem surprising that the **1698 'Shapiro' violin by Pietro Guarneri of Mantua** would prove to be the foundation of the collection, given that it is such a rarity: only around 50 instruments by Pietro still survive today. 'This violin was graceful, delicately carved, had gorgeous varnish, and was decorated with elegant fleur-de-lis inlays in the corners of its bouts,' Fulton recalls. 'Its tone was warm, polished and elegant.' Of slightly smaller dimensions than a standard violin, it has a top of fine-grained spruce, while the two-piece back, ribs and scroll are all made from the same kind of small-figured curly maple. The varnish is orange–brown.

The 'Baron Knoop' Stradivari violin of 1715 is said to have been the favourite instrument of its namesake, whose story was told in *The Strad*'s April 2023 issue. It is also Fulton's favourite of all the instruments he has collected. 'The violin is

now supple, very easy to play, has a powerful, resonant bass register, and a treble register that is silvery with lots of "sizzle",' he says. 'I've now sold most of my collection, but I'll keep the "Baron Knoop" as long as I can draw a bow.'

The 'Baron Knoop' has a two-piece back of maple with a handsomely marked broad figure, extending slightly down from the centre joint. The ribs and scroll are of similar wood, and the scroll chamfers still retain Stradivari's black edging. Due to a poorly executed restoration job earlier in its history, Fulton received the violin covered with modern deep orange–red varnish. In addition, the whole instrument had been covered in French polish. It took restorer John Becker three months to clean off these disfiguring additions in order to reveal the spectacular original varnish beneath; he also reset the neck, adjusted the pegs and made a new soundpost, bridge, bass-bar and fingerboard.

Andrea Guarneri's 1676 'Conte Vitale' viola is one of the most popular models for luthiers to copy today. Although it bears Andrea's label, it is likely to have been largely made by his son, Pietro Guarneri of Mantua.

The back is of two pieces of fine-grained maple, cut exactly on the quarter. The maple for the ribs and scroll is from a different batch and is tightly figured. The outlines of the front and back are quite dissimilar, attesting to difficulty on Guarneri's part in shaping the ribs. Notably, the outline of the upper bouts flows gracefully through the top button while the lower bouts are flatter at the very bottom. Like his grandson's cutting of the 'Lord Wilton' scroll, Andrea carved the scroll quickly and without much regard for symmetry. The rich yellow varnish is almost perfectly preserved across the whole instrument, with a fine craquelure around the scroll.

According to Fulton, the 'Conte Vitale' 'is powerful enough to stand up to a full orchestra and still be heard clearly in any hall. Yet it still blends with the other instruments in a string quartet to make a lovely, coherent, perfectly balanced and rich quartet sound.'

The 'Conte Vitale' is one of only two instruments in the collection to have retained its original neck. The other is the **c.1740 'Kreisler' Carlo Bergonzi violin**, and the neck's presence attests to its incredible state of preservation; there are no significant cracks or mechanical flaws, and the varnish is more or less complete. This despite the fact Kreisler used the violin as his principal performing instrument for more than ten years near the end of his career. 'I believe the "Kreisler" is the finest extant example of Carlo Bergonzi's work,' says Fulton. 'It is, I think, superior to the ▷

Left The 'Baron Knoop' with restored original varnish
Below left Scroll of the 'Conte Vitale' viola

Opposite page Scroll of the 1742 'Lord Wilton' Guarneri 'del Gesù'
Below The foundation of the collection: the 1698 violin by Pietro Guarneri of Mantua

ALL PHOTOS DAVID L. FULTON

majority of Stradivari instruments. The greatest Strads may be better but average Strads are not.' As well as Kreisler, the violin was owned and played by Itzhak Perlman, and it can be heard on several of his recordings from the mid-1980s. The maple of the one-piece back is marked by a bold figure descending slightly to the right, while that of the ribs and scroll is less pronounced. The top is of even-grained spruce and the varnish a red–brown colour.

The **1713 'Bass of Spain' Stradivari cello** gets its evocative name from the story of its provenance. While travelling in Spain, the instrument dealer Georges Chanot came across the top plate of the instrument hanging up in a violin maker's window. It transpired that the luthier had made a new top for the cello and kept the old one for himself. Chanot bought the top for 40 francs and sold it to Luigi Tarisio, who managed to locate the rest of the instrument and bought it for 4,000 francs. The whole lot was then purchased by Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume, who put the original top plate back, and sold it for 20,000 francs. More than a century later, Fulton bought it for $5 million.

The cello is made on Stradivari's 'B form' and has fairly full arching on both the top and back, rising prominently from the edges. The edgework is well rounded, remaining both substantial and light in appearance as it rises from the purfling. The upper and lower wings of the f-holes are quite long, while, true to Stradivari's manner, the back of the scroll's centre line is slightly off centre. The chamfers are emphasised in black ink. The red varnish has survived largely intact, despite the dramatic journey it underwent in the 19th century.

'The "Bass of Spain" has a marvellous, singing treble combined with the deepest, most sonorous bass I've ever heard,' says Fulton. 'It has a uniquely human voice; vocal, like a very great tenor combined with a great baritone. It is one of two instruments I've owned that, played properly, routinely move people to tears, the other being "La Pucelle".'

Stradivari's 1709 violin 'La Pucelle' (The Virgin) is the first known instrument of his so-called 'golden period'. Its nickname comes from Vuillaume's exclamation when he first saw the instrument: its neck and interior, including the bass-bar, were unchanged since it left the master's atelier. Made on the 'P' form, it has a back made from two pieces of nicely figured maple with strong flames, mostly of medium width and running horizontally. The ribs and scroll are of similar wood, while the front is of two pieces of medium-grain spruce. The orange-brown varnish has a thin texture over a lighter ground.

> '"LA PUCELLE" WAS MY ULTIMATE VIOLIN, AND PERHAPS THE GREATEST OF ALL STRADIVARI VIOLINS' – *DAVID L. FULTON*

The f-holes are notable for their asymmetry: the upper wing of the treble side f-hole is a little short, while that of the bass side is a little more elegant, and the top curve is slightly higher and tighter. The scroll was carved with a great deal of precision, with black ink applied directly to the wood, underneath the varnish. There are some vertical gouge cuts in evidence and saw cuts at the throat of the scroll. '"La Pucelle" was my ultimate violin,' says Fulton, 'perhaps the greatest of all Stradivari violins and the last violin I will ever purchase.'

The **1737 'King Joseph' violin by Guarneri 'del Gesù'** acquired its name in the 19th century because it was considered to be the crowning achievement of Giuseppe (Joseph) Guarneri's career. The tone quality in particular came in for praise, but the instrument itself is almost matchless in its craftsmanship. In order to describe the pristine golden-orange varnish in his 1875 book *The Violin*, the expert George Hart was compelled to quote Lord Byron's description of the colours of twilight:

Melted to one vast Iris of the West,
Where the Day joins the past Eternity;
…all its hues,
From the rich sunset to the rising star,
Their magical variety diffuse:
And now they change; a paler shadow strews
Its mantle o'er the mountains; parting day
Dies like the dolphin, whom each pang imbues
With a new colour as it gasps away,
The last still loveliest, till -- 'tis gone -- and all is grey.

Fulton agrees with Hart's sentiment: 'Even the finest photographs fail to capture the actual beauty of the fiddle,' he says. 'Holding it in good afternoon sunlight, it looks like a living flame in your hand. The violin is in superb mechanical condition with minimal repairs or restoration. This is, of course, thanks to its ▷

DAVID L. FULTON

The 'King Joseph' Guarneri 'del Gesù' was once seen as the maker's crowning achievement

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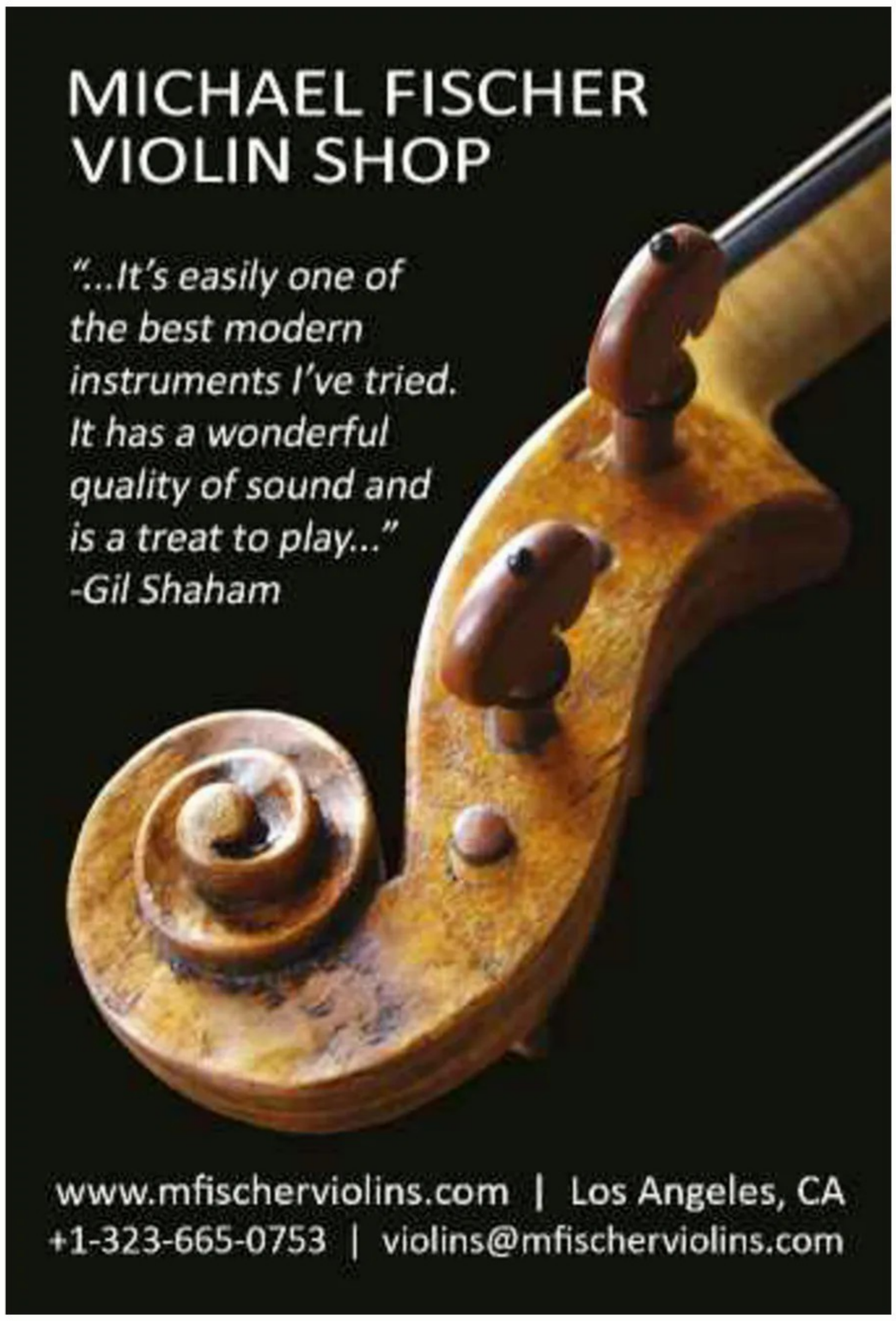

71-year slumber during the early 20th century. Consequently, the instrument has no notable "wolfs" or tonal unevenness. Though not quite as easy to play as the "Lord Wilton", it still speaks readily without excessive bow pressure. The violin's tone is golden, warm, powerful and ingratiating.' The top is made from two pieces of spruce with narrow grain broadening towards the flanks. The back is of one piece of slab-cut maple with a prominent curl ascending from left to right. The original scroll and ribs are of quarter-cut maple with medium curl.

THE GASPARO DA SALÒ VIOLA IS ONE OF THE VERY FEW VIOLAS BY THE MAKER THAT HAS NEVER BEEN CUT DOWN

The **c.1580 Gasparo da Salò viola** is one of the very few violas by the maker that has never been cut down. According to Alfred Hill, it was brought to England in the first half of the 19th century, when 'there was a vogue for violas of large size, due no doubt to Dragonetti, the celebrated double bass player, who favoured an instrument by Gasparo'. Hill also commented that large violas were sought after by professional violists during the 1930s, when he was writing, because of the success of Lionel Tertis. This viola's maple back is in two pieces, marked by a handsome small curl slanting upwards from the centre joint. The ribs have a smaller curl, and the scroll is of plain maple. The top is of open-grained spruce and the varnish is light brown. 'The scroll struck me as having an Art Deco quality, rather modern-looking, robust and quite different from the more delicate Cremonese scrolls,' says Fulton. 'The instrument's tone also has a surprising quality I can only describe as "youthful". It has the energy, strength, and immediate responsiveness of youth.' It was formerly owned by Louis Krasner, the Russian-born US violinist who premiered the violin concertos of Alban Berg and Arnold Schoenberg.

Left The c.1580 Gasparo da Salò viola has a 'youthful' tone
Below The 'Beatrice Harrison' is one of very few cellos made by Pietro Guarneri of Venice

The **1739 'Beatrice Harrison' cello by Pietro Guarneri of Venice** is certainly an impressive-sounding instrument: so much so that, according to Fulton, 'I've joked it is so powerful that the windows rattle and floor shakes when it is played. Well, nearly.' It was used by its namesake, British cellist Beatrice Harrison (1892–1965), as her principal performing instrument for many years; although according to UK dealer Arthur Hill, she treated the instrument so badly that she might have halved its value. Baron Knoop also owned the instrument for around a decade. It is one of only five or six known cellos made by Pietro Guarneri and in Fulton's words, 'It is, by far, the best of the Guarneri cellos. It has a marvellous, brilliant voice.'

In 1994 Fulton purchased the **1737 'Panette' violin by Guarneri 'del Gesù'** directly from its owner, the violin virtuoso Isaac Stern, who had been performing on it for almost 50 years. It can be heard on countless recordings by Stern, and now by its current player, Renaud Capuçon, who has had the instrument since 2005. In his autobiography, *Isaac Stern: My First 79 Years,*

Stern commented on the violin: 'Sometimes there is a deep psychological affinity between an instrument and its player. I have certainly felt that way about my Guarnerius del Gesu called the "Panette", which was 208 years old when I bought it from the collection of Ralph Norton in Chicago in 1945.' The 'Panette' is a product of the maker's late period (he died in 1744) and, like the 'King Joseph' of the same year, shows the idiosyncratic touch of 'del Gesù' everywhere from the f-holes to the scroll. It has excellent projection and a full-bodied sound, with an abundance of colours and tonal richness to hand.

The **1733 'Sassoon' violin** was made by Antonio Stradivari when he was 89 years old. There is little evidence that he was helped very much by his sons Omobono and Francesco, and nearly all of it appears to have been Antonio's own work. He added a small label reading 'd'anni 89', and some elements of its creation suggest the work of an older man, such as the somewhat shaky line of the purfling.

The back is cut on the quarter from one piece of maple with irregular medium-width flames slightly ascending from the treble side to the bass. The top is of two pieces of spruce with medium-width grain at the centre, broadening on the flanks. The sides are of quarter-cut maple with broader flames than the back, while the scroll is of somewhat plainer maple than the sides. The varnish is plentiful and has a rich reddish-brown colour, laid on a golden ground.

'The violin is not particularly easy to play,' says Fulton. 'It requires very specific bows to reach its depths. The one that worked best was an early Tourte that was actually quite stiff. That said, in the right hands, the violin's tone is dark and very rich, a voice which I find both evocative and quite moving. The "Sassoon" is an almost uniquely great violin and I lamented its departure.'

Finally, we come to the **1742 'Lord Wilton' Guarneri 'del Gesù' violin**, most famously the violin owned and played by Yehudi Menuhin for many years. It was bought by Fulton in 1999 for $6 million – a record for a violin at that time. According to Fulton: 'The instrument's response is perfectly even, from its resonant bass to the highest treble notes. Unlike many "del Gesùs", it has no wolf notes… Its tone is so powerful that some violinists have said it's almost like the fiddle has another player inside, playing in unison, some say it's a nuclear-powered fiddle.'

One of Guarneri's undisputed masterpieces, the 'Lord Wilton' exhibits the characteristic idiosyncrasies of the maker. Most obviously, the f-holes are clearly asymmetrical, with the one on the treble standing perfectly straight while the bass one leans conspicuously off centre. The scroll has also been apparently carved in a hurry, with many toolmarks in evidence and again, a startling lack of symmetry between the treble and bass sides. The outline is bold and imposing, unlike such contemporaneous instruments as the 'Vieuxtemps' of 1741, and closer to the 1743 'Carrodus'. As with many Guarneris of this period, the corners are relatively sharp. The violin is in an excellent state of preservation, still covered by abundant orange-gold varnish. ●

The 'Lord Wilton' Guarneri is in an excellent state of preservation

The Strad Calendar 2024 can be purchased from The Strad Shop: **bit.ly/3E5iKaU**. *The Fulton Collection* book can be purchased at **bit.ly/47EgkxE**

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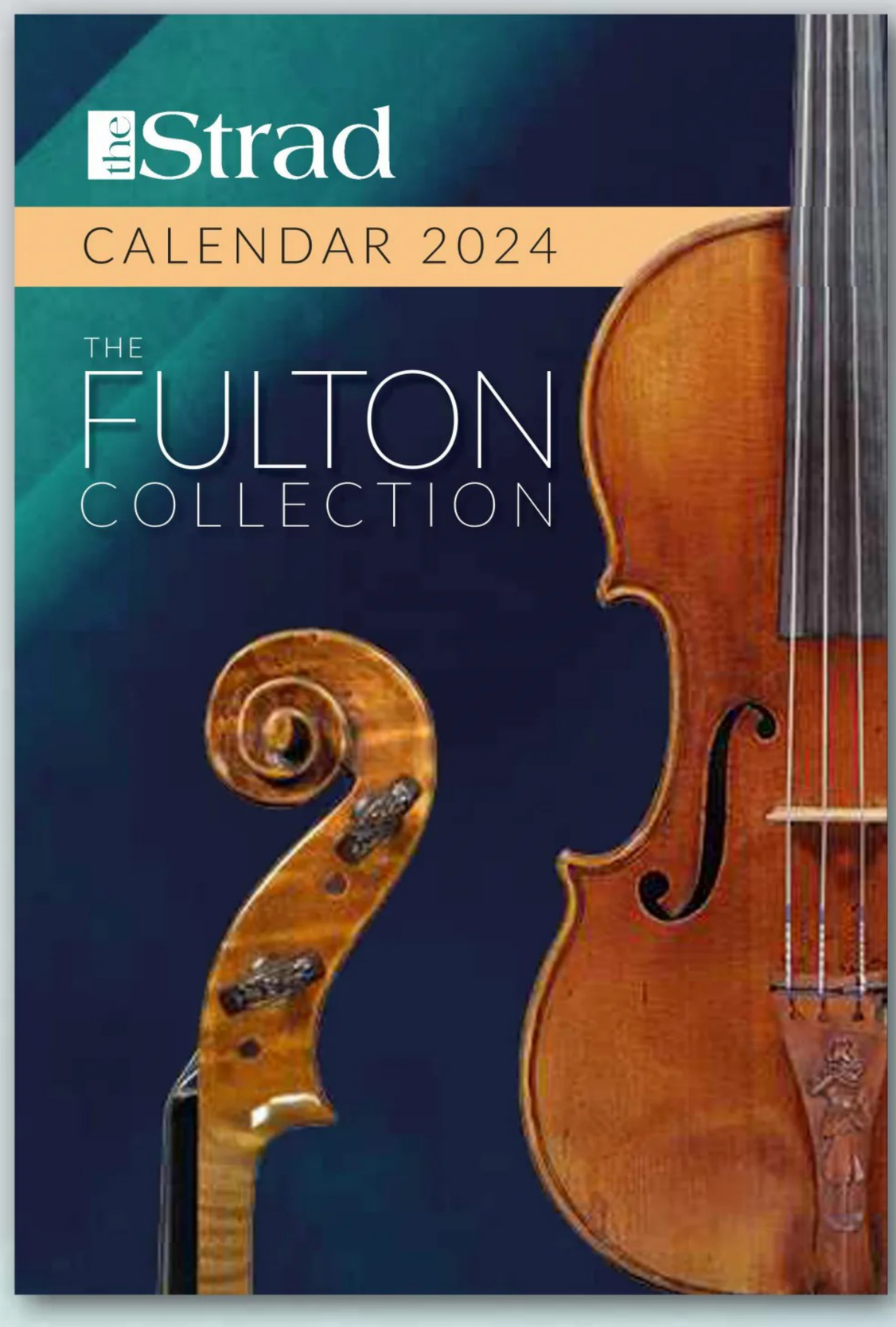
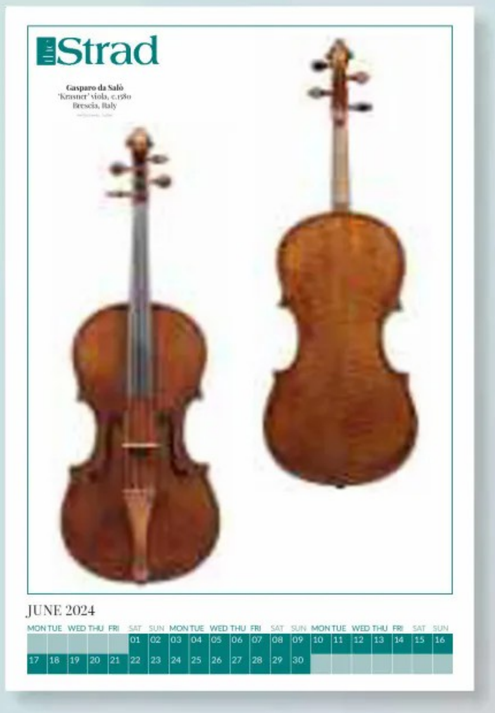
the Strad CALENDAR 2024

THE FULTON COLLECTION



American collector David L. Fulton amassed one of the 20th century's finest collections of stringed instruments. This year's calendar pays tribute to some of these priceless treasures, including Yehudi Menuhin's celebrated 'Lord Wilton' Guarneri, the Carlo Bergonzi once played by Fritz Kreisler, and four instruments by Antonio Stradivari.



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THE TWELVE INSTRUMENTS FEATURED THIS YEAR ARE:

- c.1580 Gasparo da Salò viola
- 1676 'Conte Vitale' Andrea Guarneri viola
- 1698 'Shapiro' Pietro Guarneri of Mantua violin
- 1709 'La Pucelle' Antonio Stradivari violin
- 1713 'Bass of Spain' Antonio Stradivari cello
- 1715 'Baron Knoop' Antonio Stradivari violin
- 1733 'Sassoon' Antonio Stradivari violin
- 1737 'King Joseph' Guarneri 'del Gesù' violin
- 1737 'Panette' Guarneri 'del Gesù' violin
- 1739 'Beatrice Harrison' Pietro Guarneri of Venice cello
- c.1740 'Fritz Kreisler' Carlo Bergonzi violin
- 1742 'Lord Wilton' Guarneri 'del Gesù' violin

www.thestradshop.com/calendar

IN FOCUS

A close look at the work of great and unusual makers

JOSEPH PANORMO

WRITTEN BY ANDREW FAIRFAX

Joseph Panormo, born in Naples around 1768, was the second eldest of Vincenzo Panormo's four sons and would have begun working in his father's workshop after the family moved from London to Paris in 1779. On returning to London ten years later, Joseph continued assisting Vincenzo and must have been joined by his younger brother George during the early 1790s. The youngest son, Louis, later renowned for his guitars but previously listed as a bow and violin maker, would have been enlisted into the workshop by the late 1790s.

Vincenzo is recorded in Dublin towards the end of 1800, about the time Joseph appears to have begun working independently in London. ln 1801 he wrote a receipt in ltalian after making two basses for Domenico Dragonetti and the following year is listed as an instrument maker in Portland Street. When Vincenzo died in 1813 both George, after living for five years in an area of Shoreditch closely associated with the Betts workshop, and Louis were living in Monmouth Street, a stone's throw from where Louis would establish his guitar making business. Meanwhile Joseph had moved to King Street, Soho, and is later listed with his son Edward Ferdinand as Joseph Panormo & Son. He appears to have struggled in later life, and died in 1837 in St Anne's Workhouse, near his last address in New Compton Street, his occupation given as 'pauper'.

MAKER
JOSEPH PANORMO

NATIONALITY
ITALIAN

BORN
c.1768

DIED
1837

INSTRUMENT
VIOLIN

DATE
c.1800

MODEL

This c.1800 violin, which has remained in the same family for several generations, represents an excellent example of Joseph's early independent work. He generally followed a Stradivari pattern and this violin clearly demonstrates some of Joseph's personal characteristics from the time he was emerging from under the shadow of his father.

LABEL

Unlike George and Louis, who even shared the same 'Panormo Fecit' label in the early years, Joseph did not label his instruments, perhaps suggesting many were made for 'the trade'. lnstead they are occasionally signed, either inside the back where a label would normally be placed, or on the top-block, as in this example.

INTERNAL CONSTRUCTION

Although Vincenzo's early work does not have the C-bout linings mortised into the corner-blocks in the Cremonese style, the rib structures showing Joseph's hand clearly do. This is often characterised by the way the blocks have been cut back after the linings were inserted to reveal them entering the mortice.

LOCATING PINS

Unlike the larger oval location pins favoured by Vincenzo that were placed well inside the purfling and generally either side of the centre, Joseph's are of a more standard size, round and closer to the purfling, occasionally disappearing underneath.

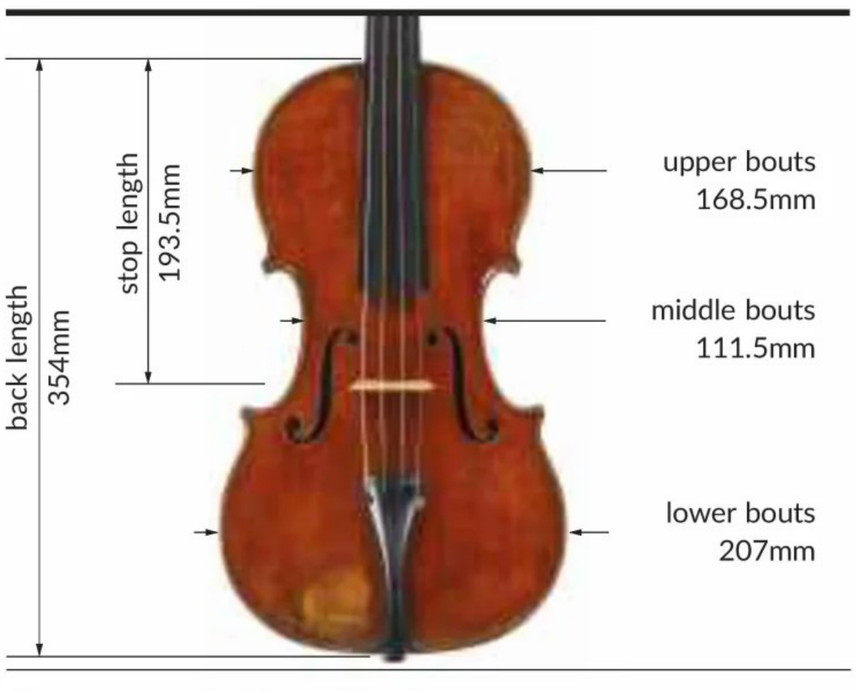
SCROLL

Joseph not only blackened the bevels of his deeply carved scrolls in the manner of Stradivari but regularly treated the rib mitres in the same manner.

VARNISH

The varnish is a fairly thin red-brown colour over a slightly stained ground often encountered on instruments from this period. ▹

CLOSE-UP PHOTOS ANDREW FAIRFAX. ALL OTHER PHOTOS DANIELLANE.COM



All measurements taken with a tape measure

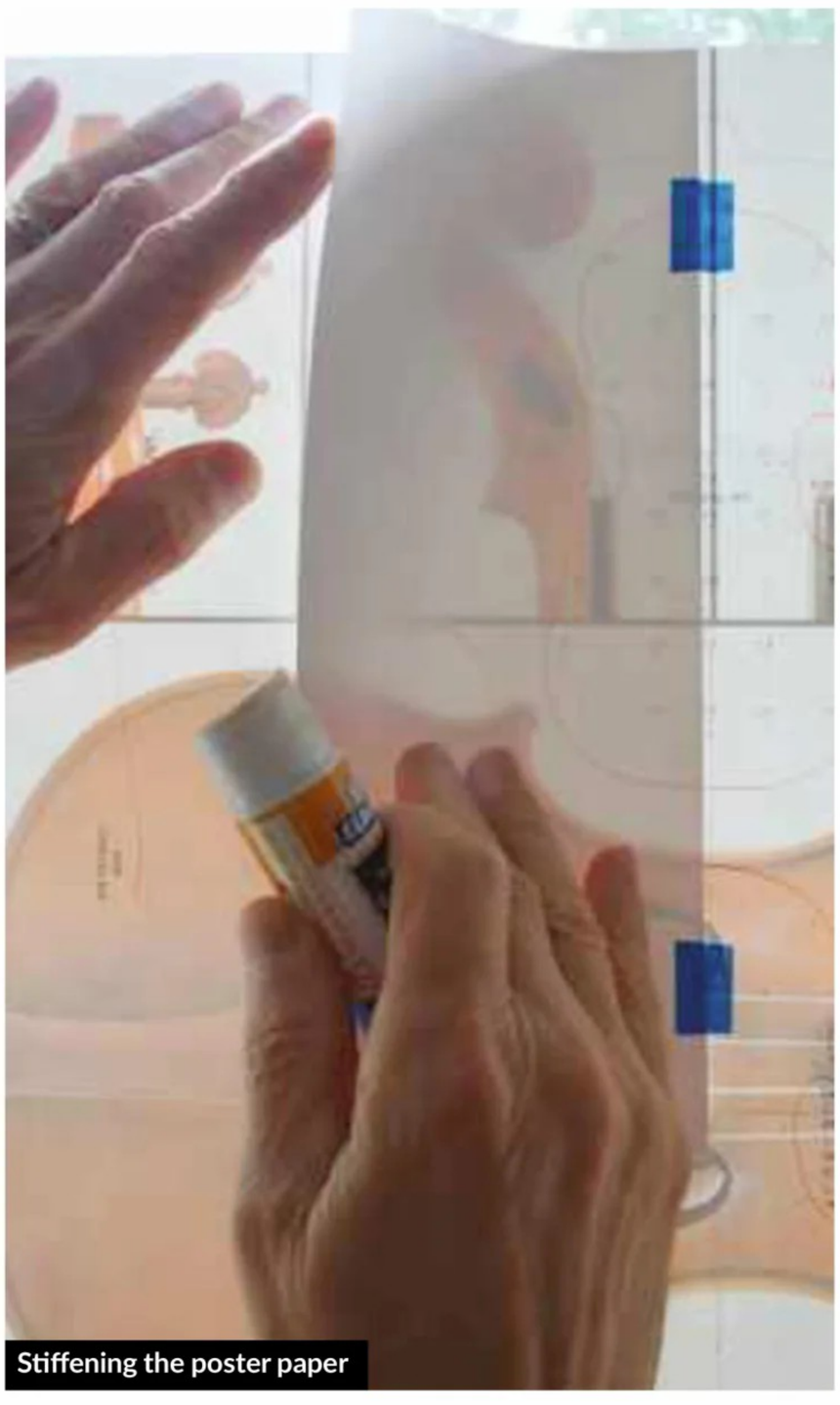
Making a mould and templates from a poster

A quick, efficient and accurate way of cutting durable templates using one of *The Strad*'s publications

BY DON LEISTER

Luthier based in Richmond, VA, US

When I make a copy or model of a classical instrument, I usually take inspiration from *The Strad*'s posters. I examine fine instruments in person as often as I can; this way I gather essential sculptural information needed to make a three-dimensional object from a two-dimensional set of plans, such as a poster or a book. In this article I explain how I use a laminated poster by *The Strad* to make a mould and templates of the archings, f-holes and scroll. I will also illustrate a novel way of using a two-dimensional f-hole template to draw an f-hole on to a three-dimensional arched violin with good results. The poster I am using here is of the 1649 'Alard' violin by Nicolò Amati, published in 1992; it has exceptional photographs. It also has very useful information, albeit limited compared to more recent posters of other instruments.



Stiffening the poster paper

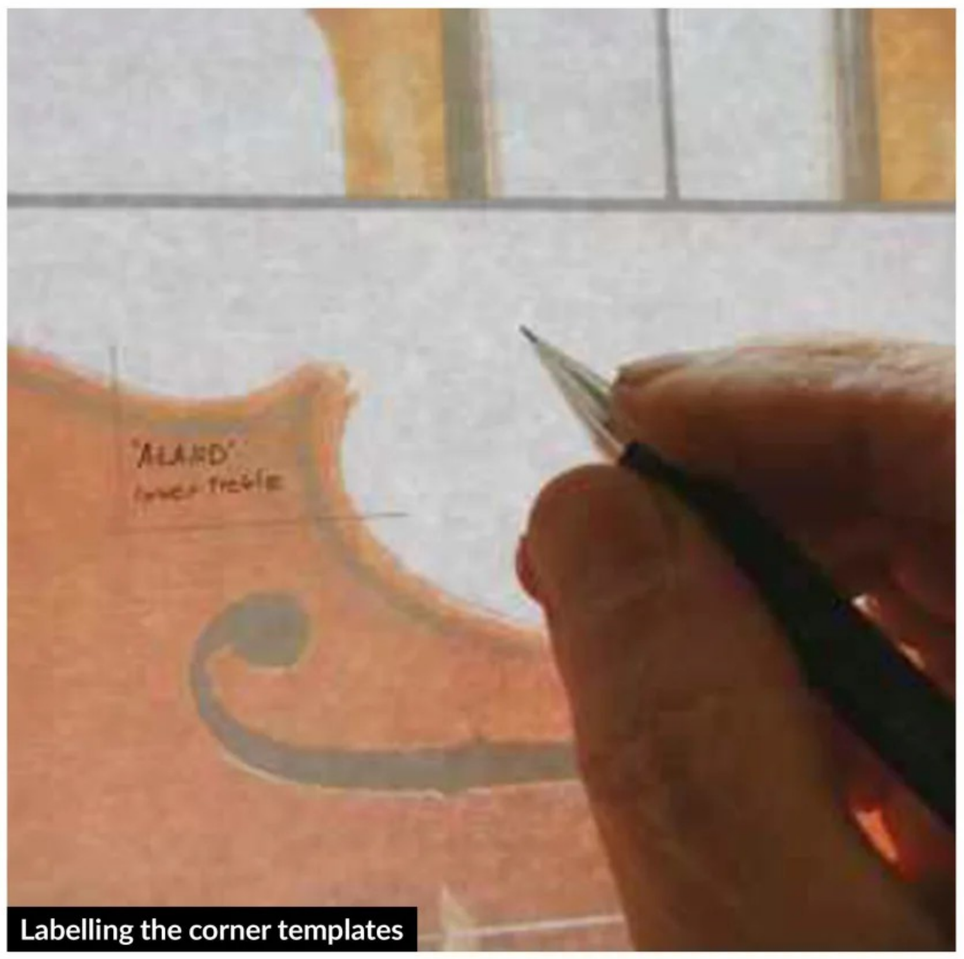
1 First, I glue paper or thicker card stock on to the areas of the poster back, such as the archings and the scroll, that are to be used repeatedly as working templates. A glue paste stick works well for this. It's good to have two posters to cut up, one for templates and one to keep intact for reference.

I visit a self-help print shop where, using an industrial laminating machine, I can laminate the poster in sections. Their machines use 5mm-thickness pouches which add stiffness and durability to the templates. Before laminating them it is necessary to label each template. Trying to label them afterwards is harder, as the ink tends to rub off the plastic laminate.

The photo shows the poster against a bright window, to help me register the card stock behind the scroll for gluing. Some tape hinges help register the backing.

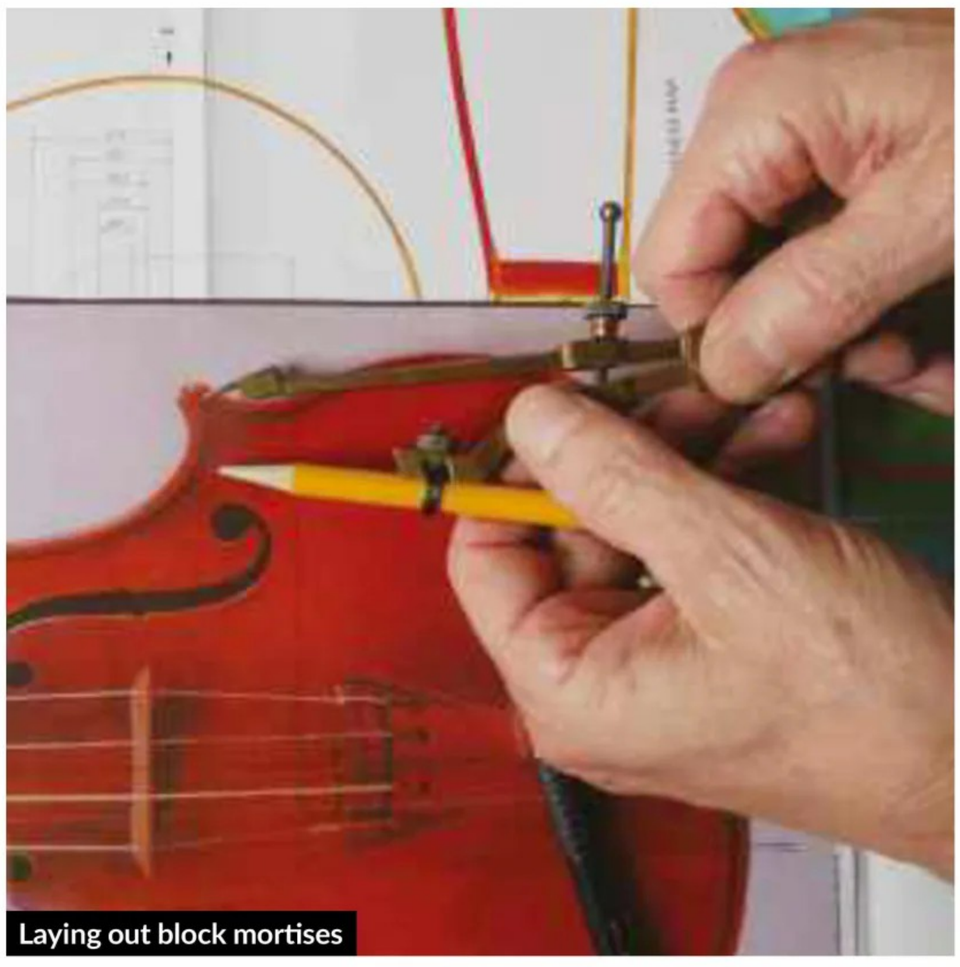
Labelling the arching patterns

2 I label the bass and treble sides, and mark a line up from the edges of the plates for later reference. As you see from the chain of finished arching templates, the edges are cut away. A centre-line mark is also needed, since I cut the patterns in half.



Labelling the corner templates

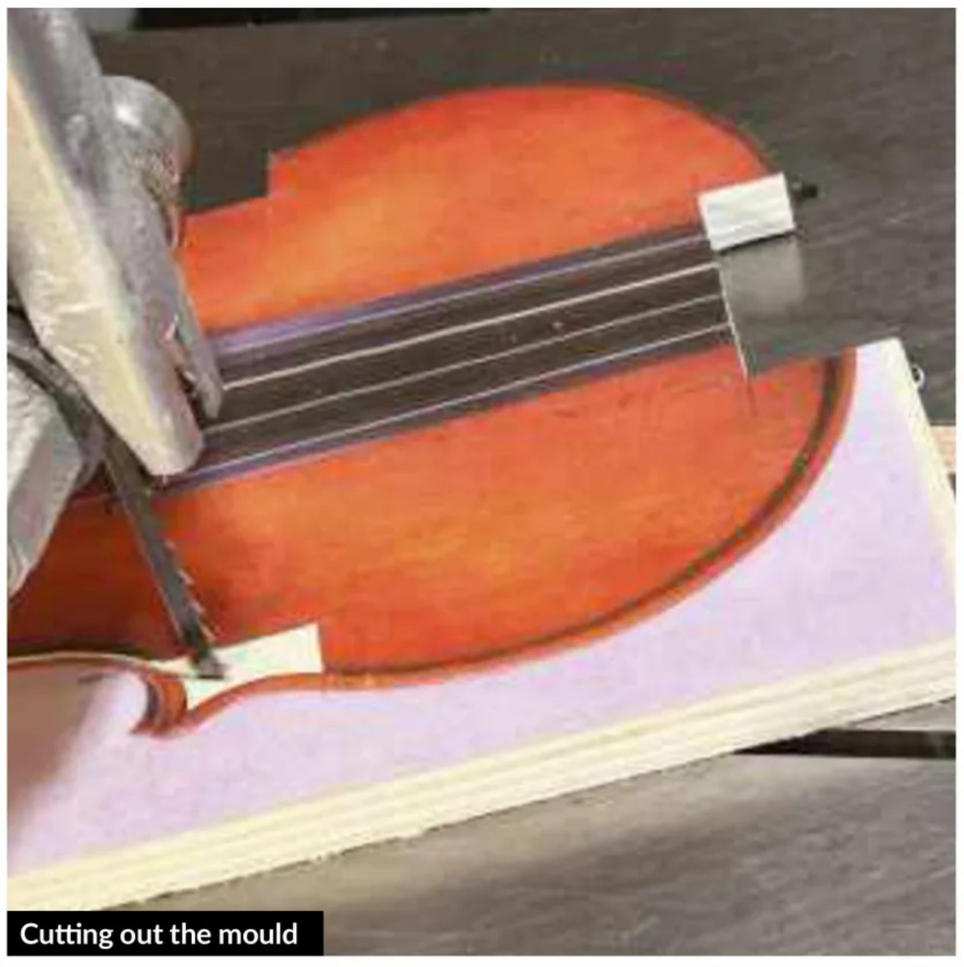
4 By placing the poster up to a backlight (I use a window with natural light), I am able to see my future corner and end-block layouts clearly, and can label them before the image is laminated. When everything is labelled and laminated, the next step is to glue the image of the front on to a piece of birch plywood, half an inch thick. The glue stick works well here; it will release the image after I have cut out the mould.



Laying out block mortises

3 Before laminating the images I lay out the locations of the corner and bottom-block mortises. I am referencing another of *The Strad*'s posters (the 1735 'Baron Knoop' Bergonzi) with CT scans of a rib garland to help me locate my corner-block locations.

The lines drawn here will be cut through the laminate to make the block templates, and will also mark the cut-outs on the wooden mould.



Cutting out the mould

5 Once the image is glued to the plywood, I cut out the corner and end-block templates with a sharp knife. Then I saw the mould out with my bandsaw. I'm using the outside black line of the purfling as a guide to define the outline of my mould. ▹

ALL PHOTOS LAURA CHESSIN

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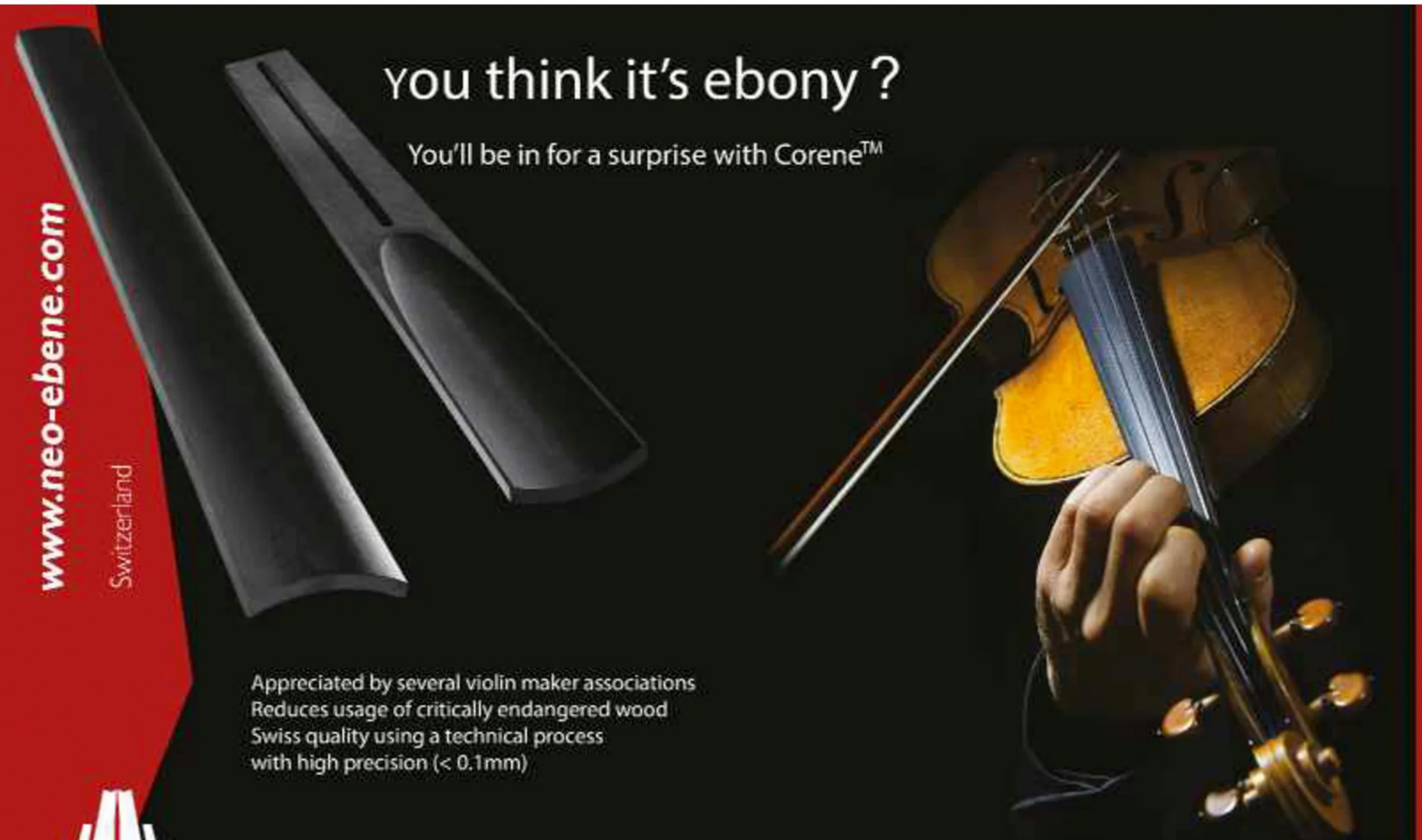

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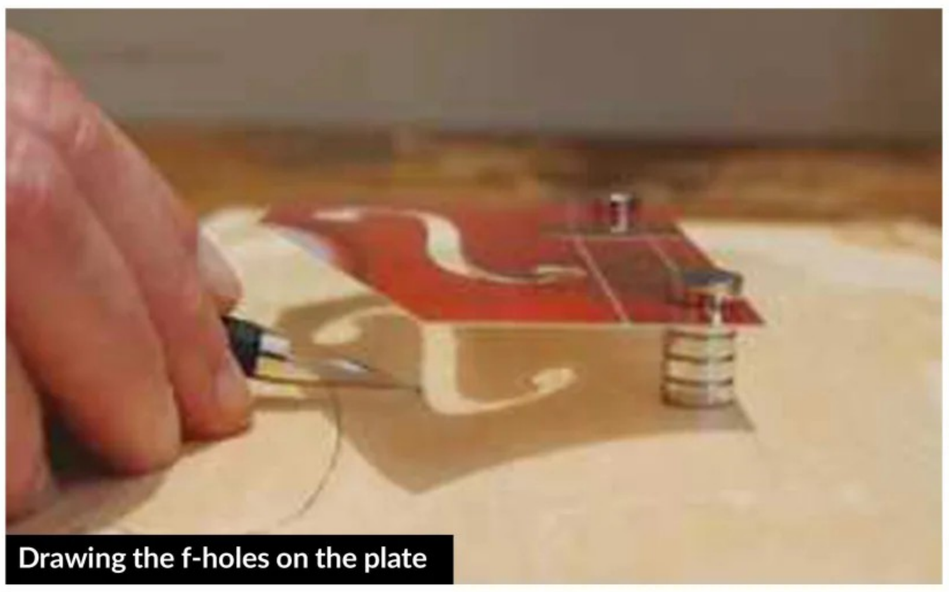
Cutting the f-hole templates

6 I backed up the f-hole areas of the poster with card stock before laminating, so that the f-hole templates stay flat and hard enough to be easily trimmed with a knife or file. I have used templates like this for years and they hold up very well. I have found pressure-sensitive laminates to be softer, less durable and more difficult to trim to shape. The industrial laminating machine that uses 5mm pouches is great!



Drawing the f-holes on the plate

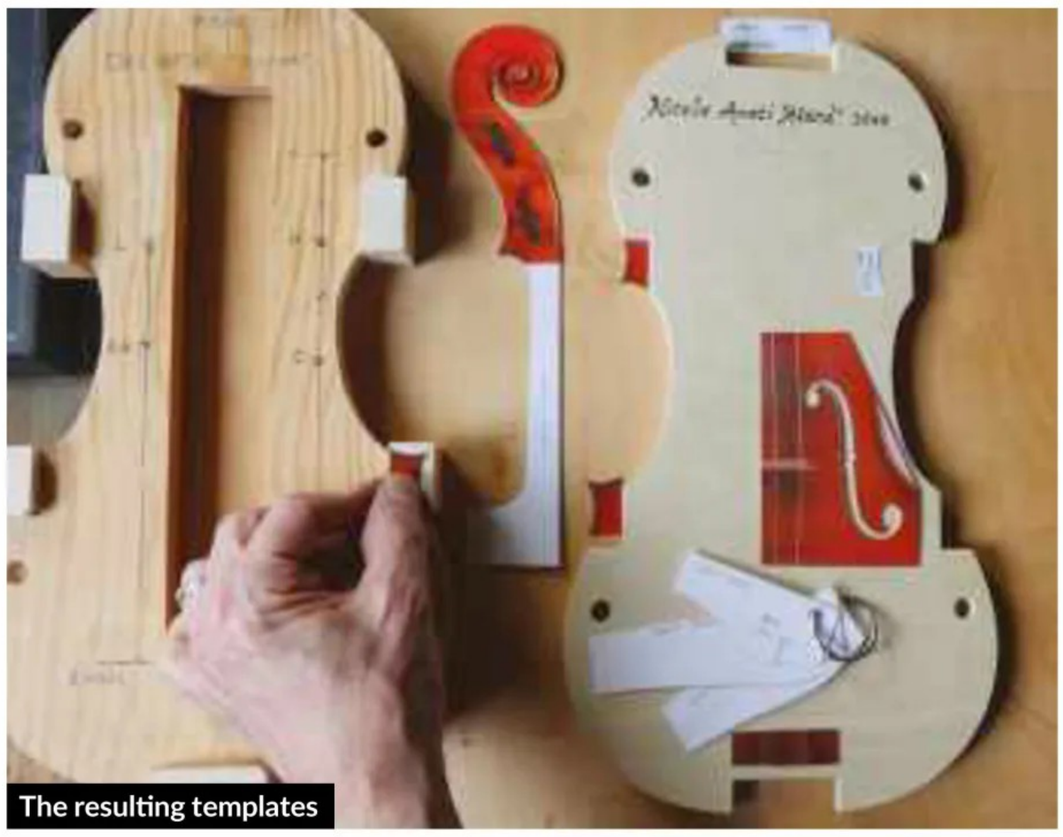
7 Most images of f-holes are taken from the front, which look great until you try bending the template across a voluptuous violin belly. Then they start to look strange. A good way to reduce the distortion is to keep the template flat and allow a light to cast a shadow on to the belly. I use a small LED spotlight mounted about eight feet above my bench, which casts a good sharp shadow, and I use a stack of magnets to raise the template high enough over the belly for me to get a pencil underneath. The further the distance the better; there will be less shift in the size of the shadow. Also, the closer the template is to the belly the better. The shadow enlarges as the template gets further from the belly (using a taller stack of magnets).

The partially carved belly shown here is hollowed out a little, and allows the small magnets on the underside to engage the magnets that are holding the template in place.

I start my f-hole layout by marking where the eyes of the 'f' belong, and then align the cast shadow accordingly.

The neck template

8 I overlay this part of the poster with white paper to draw my shop neck pattern adjacent to the scroll image, thereby creating a whole new neck template. Earlier I backed the poster image with card stock, so once it is laminated it will be more durable. Even better is to use 1mm-thick maple rib stock for the neck/scroll template. However, I would not put that through a laminating machine. I would laminate the image, then glue it to the maple stock.



The resulting templates

9 Here are the resulting templates. *The Strad*'s more recent posters offer more data with modern high-resolution images using CT scans of long and cross-archings, front and back, rib garlands, thickness contours and elevation contours. They are a real treasure trove of information for violin makers.

MY SPACE

A peek into lutherie workshops around the world

LUTHIER

ROBERTO REGAZZI

LOCATION

Bologna, Italy

I've been making instruments for 53 years, originally in the basement of my parents' house. I used to make mainly guitars but in 1971 I met the Bologna violin maker Otello Bignami who became my mentor when I completed my first two years of physics at Bologna University. He taught me in his house for a while, and them I moved to a workshop in via Angelo Musco, in the centre of town, which I still own. In 1996 I bought a house in the mountains, 30 minutes' drive from Bologna, where I carried out most of my new making, but in 2018 I bought a new property on the outskirts of the city, which took more than a year to renovate and build my ideal workshop. It was finally ready in 2020, just before the pandemic took hold. Now I spend most of my working life in this atelier, and go to the one in the town centre once a week.

My new workshop is around 48 sq m, and divided into two sections. One space, shown in the smaller photo, is for new making but the much larger area is for restoration work, as well as for receiving customers. I also have a room for varnishing, another one with good acoustics for testing instruments, a wood store and a specialist library with many rare books.

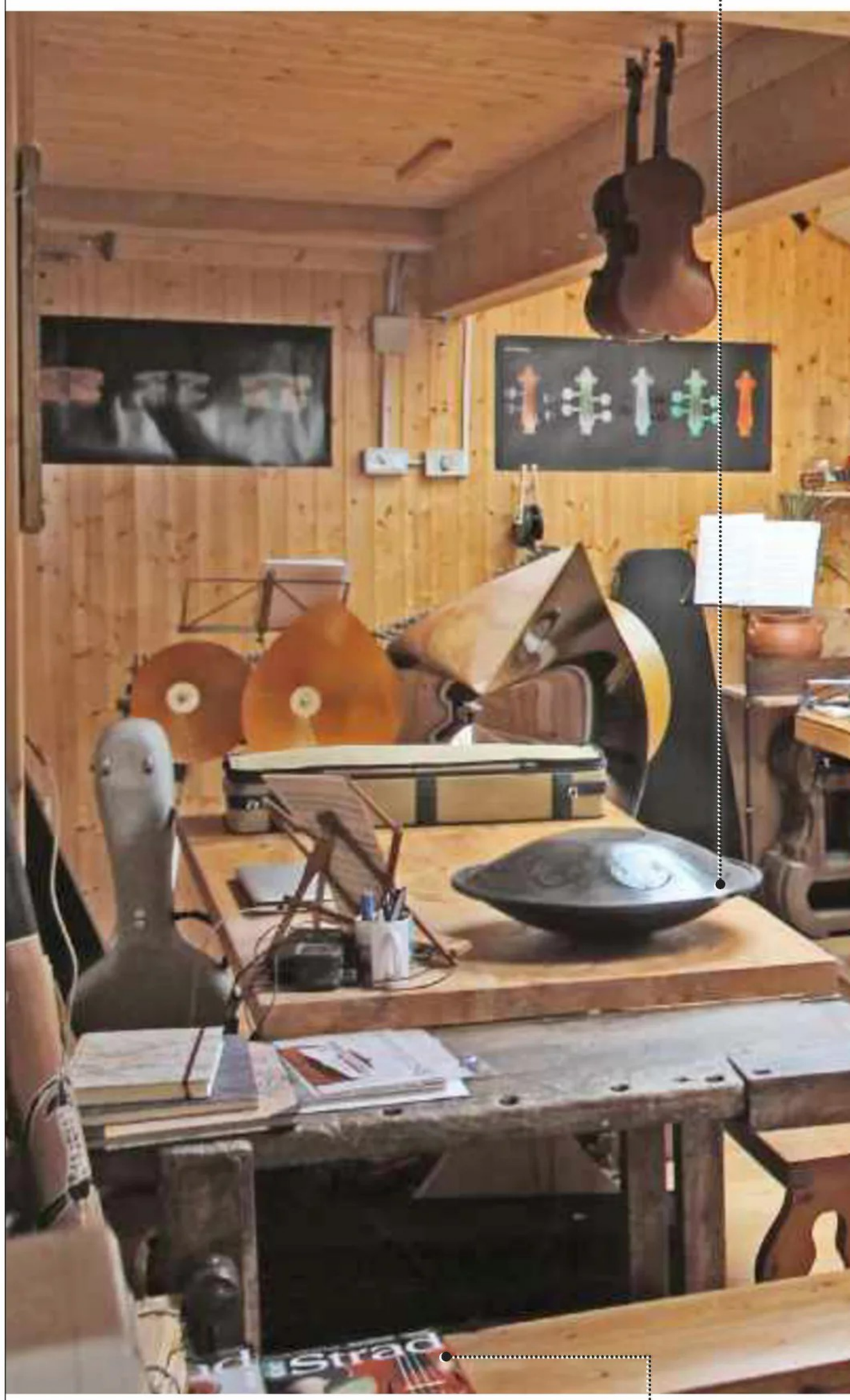
I use a few different models for my instruments. Mostly I use Guarneri, Stradivari, Ansaldo Poggi and Augusto Pollastri, but I vary them a lot. Of the relics and documents of the Bolognese makers I've been collecting over the years, some are in my library and others are on the bench in the top right. They include the diary report of Paolo Morara when both he and Ansaldo Poggi were exposed to Giuseppe Fiorini's step-by-step teaching in Rome.

From time to time musicians come here to give informal concerts. Last year we had the whole ZHdK Strings Orchestra from Zurich with Rudolf Koelman, and we hope to have more in the future.

INTERVIEW BY CHRISTIAN LLOYD

PORTRAIT PHOTOS LUCA BOLOGNESE. WORKSHOP PHOTOS ROBERTO REGAZZI

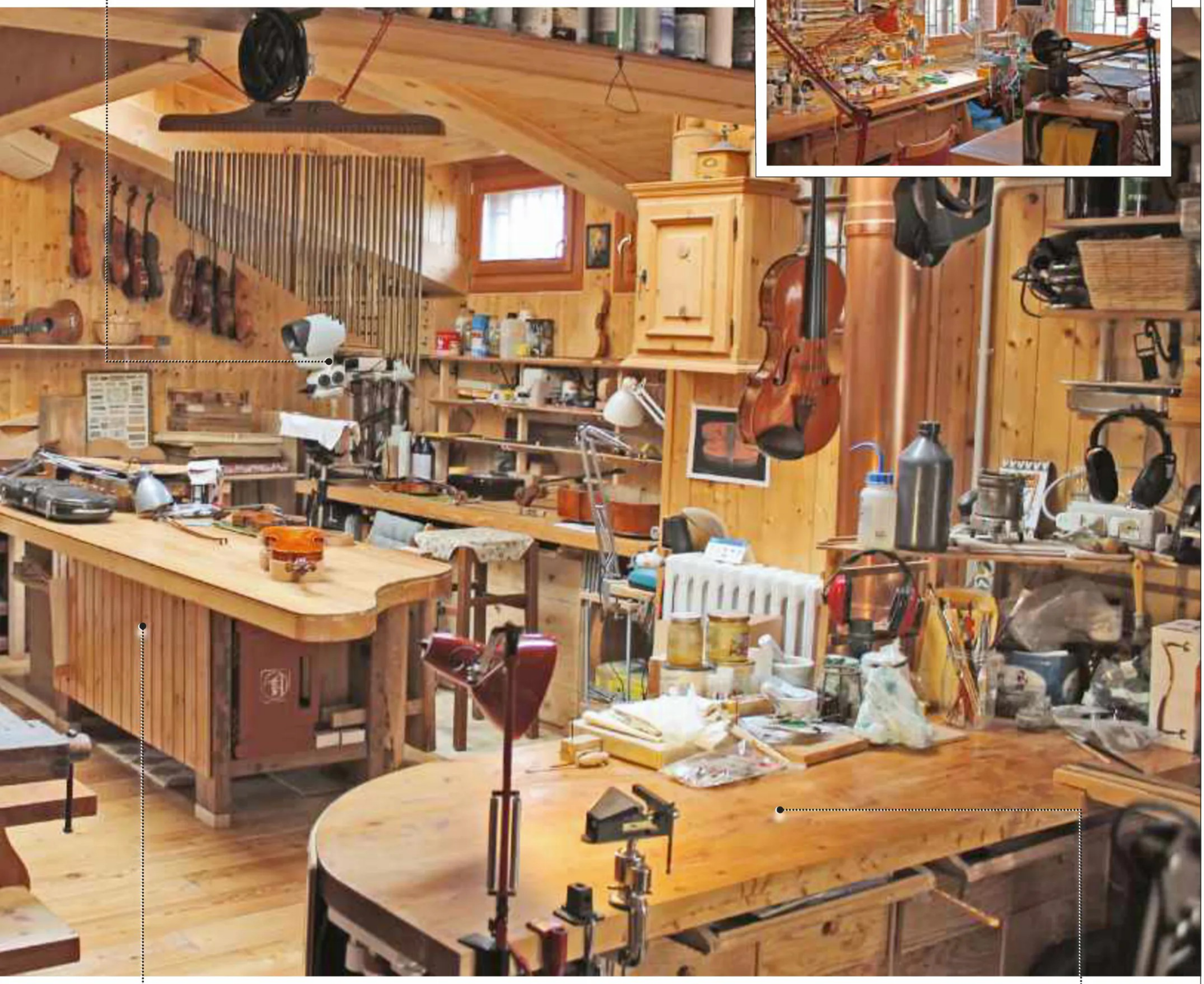
I collect some types of percussion instruments including this handpan from Russia. Behind it you can see a 'Cristal Baschet', a kind of glass harmonica originally invented by Ernst Chladni, one of the founding fathers of the modal analysis used by violin makers.



I feel lucky to own a full set of *The Strad* magazine from its first edition in May 1890. In the 1990s I was able to buy two collections in the US that complemented each other, and I've been keeping it up to date ever since.

I have a few high-tech tools for special work on important instruments. For instance, I use this optical Dynascope for retouching, as its more than three million rotating micro-lenses allow for a very good 3D microscopic view.

Right In this area I have set up a solar tunnel with a Fresnel lens on the portion of the roof not used for producing electricity. It directs a good deal of the sunlight into this section. Nearby is my acoustic corner, with space for my 'impact gadgets'.



Among the instruments currently on my bench for set-up or restoration are a violin that once belonged to the composer Ottorino Respighi, before he switched to the viola, and another one I dedicated to Claudio Abbado.

There are six workbenches in the restoration section of the workshop, and five for new making, all of which I made from cypress. With its persistent smell, the wood helps keep the room free of woodworm.

Ringing the changes

In 2021 bow maker **Markus Laine** was commissioned to make 15 transitional bows to be used by a single chamber orchestra. What were the challenges – and what change did it make to the sound?

Nine bow blanks ready to be carved into transitional bows

In November 2021 I received a call from Tomas Djupsjöbacka, cellist and principal conductor of the Vaasa City Orchestra (VCO) in Finland. He shared his vision of recreating the orchestral sound of the Classical period (c.1730 to 1820) by marrying modern stringed instruments with Classical or transitional bows. These bows lack the power of modern bows but the sound produced is expressive, more flexible and certainly different. Would playing modern instruments with transitional bows create an orchestral sound closer to the Classical period? Making the transitional bows for the orchestra would certainly be a challenging project, but one I eagerly accepted.

Initially, Tomas and I decided to try copies of a Tourte bow with a swan head for all the instruments. In February 2022 I sent sample bows to Finland to be tested. The initial reactions were positive: the violinists were satisfied with the weight of their bow and gave their seal approval to the swan-head Tourte model. The violists and cellists, however, preferred a heavier bow, closer to the modern ones they were accustomed to playing. To address the violists' preferences, I made a copy of a swan-head Cramer-style viola bow to add weight at the tip; and for the cellists, a copy of a heavier John Dodd bow, also with a swan head. After considering the musicians' response, I began work on the main project: 15 bows with pernambuco sticks and frogs with buttons of mammoth ivory.

This process actually began years previously, because I store prepared sticks in various stages of development – from raw wood and cut wood to bent and cambered sticks. Each stick of pernambuco needs to rest and lose its tension at its own pace. The sticks are numbered and dated, ranging from the current year to decades past.

I considered the playing styles of the VCO musicians in selecting the pieces of pernambuco. Since I live in New York City and had not heard them in person, I watched YouTube videos to get an idea of their particular styles, so I could make bows specifically for them. For example, for the concertmaster I chose wood that was fairly low in density but very resistant, thus allowing me to make a light yet strong bow. For the other violin bows I used wood from another tree with

NOT ALL THE ANGLES WERE SYMMETRICAL, YET EVERYTHING FLOWED NICELY

The frogs and heads of the eight violin bows clearly display the colour differences

a slightly higher density. This resulted in a more stable stick but with a slower response. Most of the bows were made of stock from a single pernambuco tree, while four of them (two violin, one viola and one cello) were made from a tree with slightly less dense wood.

For this project I used only the materials and hand tools that were available for making bows in the 18th century. The only concession I made to modern practice was the use of electricity for the jeweller's lathe and bandsaw. I had studied and made bench copies of a Tourte bow, attempting to replicate its sound. I discovered that not all the angles on the bow were symmetrical, yet everything fitted together and flowed nicely. For example, the face angle is slightly tilted and both sides of the head are different. The stick is not a pure octagon, and often the handle's bottom facet is tilted. The frog fits on to the handle and the top surface of the frog is aligned.

I worked the stick close to the final measurements, using the button as a guide for size. I then fitted the shaped frog to the stick. Fortunately I was familiar with the method of fitting older-style frogs to the stick (such as those of clip-on bows, before octagonal-handle frogs became fashionable). After fitting them securely, I marked them on the seating area with scribed Roman numbers to prevent the frogs and sticks from being separated.

After working the wood with scrapers and emery paper, I polished it to a burnished sheen with equisetum. I then rubbed each of the bows with linseed oil, dried them in the sun and rubbed them with pumice to cut back the old layers. This cycle was repeated: oil, sun, and pumice – then the wood was left to dry for weeks. The oxidation process with the oil and pernambuco brought out vibrant colours in the wood, from beautiful reds to deep red-browns.

For the few weeks when I had the eight violin bows in the shop, I was able to compare the differences in sound. The biggest difference was between the light and strong responsive woods. The first bow I completed, for the first violinist, was lively with quick responses. It produced shimmering overtones, much like other bows from that same tree. Bows from the slightly denser wood were articulate and clean-sounding with stable playability.

I experimented by adding weight to the bows, since they would be used on modern instruments. Inspired by an excellent Dodd violin bow with a swan head and a silver-capped button, I made an extra silver-capped mammoth button. When I added it, the change in weight made most of the bows feel more 'planted' on the strings, with the sound becoming more focused. The most notable change was with the more lively and flexible bows, which became more stable; however, they lost some of their unique sound in the process. After careful trials I decided not to use the heavier buttons.

Since delivering the bows to the VCO members, I have asked them for their feedback on the experience of playing with them. Concertmaster Maano Männi told me: 'These bows are light and easy to articulate, especially spiccato, staccato and many other musical effects.' Second concertmaster Matilda Haavisto added, 'The lightness of the bow helps natural phrasing in music of the Classical period. Being more bouncy than a modern bow and giving a nice extra bite to the attack on the string, it often helps give clear articulation.'

The bows make their debut in September, in the opening concert of the VCO's 2023–24 season which will feature Beethoven's 'Eroica' Symphony. It should be fascinating to hear the sound of the 15 musicians together, all playing with these bows. It has been a challenge and a privilege to make these bows and hugely rewarding to hear them side by side.

Cello frogs

Viola frogs

ALL PHOTOS MARKUS LAINE

MASTERCLASS

KOUSSEVITZKY DOUBLE BASS CONCERTO, FIRST MOVEMENT

Double bass soloist **Leon Bosch** uncovers the challenges and opportunities of this emotionally powerful piece

From Koussevitzky Double Bass Concerto Op.3. Urtext edition, paperbound with marked and unmarked string part for solo and orchestral tuning. Ed. and fingering, Tobias Glöckler, Pf reduction, Christoph Sobanski. Order no. HN 1451, ISMN 979-0-2018-1451-3. €22.00. Printed with permission of G. Henle Verlag, Munich © 2023

Serge Koussevitzky is remembered as one of the great double bass virtuosos, often mentioned in the same breath as Dragonetti and Bottesini. However, whereas those two composers wrote a lot of music for their instrument, Koussevitzky only wrote five pieces for bass: the Concerto op.3 and four other works for bass and piano. His biggest contribution to new music was to come later with the commissions he made as music director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra (BSO). One of the most famous of these was Bartók's *Concerto for Orchestra*, which is among many important 20th-century works that were commissioned for the BSO, and the Koussevitzky Foundation still gives funding for commissions.

This double bass concerto – which Koussevitzky wrote in 1902, just after his appointment as principal bass of the Bolshoi Theatre – remains one of the stalwarts of the bassist's repertoire. It's not a complicated piece but it is emotionally affecting and I think it is universally loved. My first copy of the music is dated December 1980 and its well-worn pages are testament to how often I have played the piece. Performing it many times with orchestra has enabled me to discover some of the challenges inherent in the composition, and how best to solve them.

Energy for projection and restraint in tempo choices

Various editions pre-date this one, and several different orchestrations too. Some include four horns, woodwind and harp; others just strings, because the biggest problem the soloist will have is projection. The piece begins with a heroic, declamatory tutti and that leads directly to a recitative-like cadenza for the double bass. The most important thing is to give your first entry a fighting chance acoustically against the big tutti that the audience will have heard. Often it can sound a little anaemic

JUNO SNOWDON

THE SOLOIST

NAME
LEON BOSCH

NATIONALITY
SOUTH AFRICAN–BRITISH

STUDIED WITH
ZOLTÁN KOVÁCS, MAX RUNGE, RODNEY SLATFORD

RECORDS FOR
MERIDIAN

'Any temptation to run away with the semiquavers will undermine the integrity of the thematic material in the orchestra'

Discover Leon Bosch's research and revival of the works of Catalan virtuoso Josep Cervera-Bret at bitly.ws/RSnm and a video filmed at the time of the recording at bitly.ws/RSnw

by comparison so consider where on the string to play, with how much bow, and how much weight is needed in order to produce the sound necessary to match the orchestra.

A perennial problem with this cadenza is that people tend to play it too freely, in my opinion. Admittedly it is marked *ad lib.* in most earlier editions, but here it isn't. One has to resist the temptation to play with too much rhythmical freedom so as to be able to hand over to the orchestra effectively in bar 10. The same rhythmic imperative applies at the end of the second cadenza, where the soloist leads the orchestra into the main theme at bar 20. It is usually marked *alla breve* in other editions, and it's useful to note that this theme isn't marked at a new tempo but rather the same allegro as the beginning.

Here, we have a dilemma: although the solo part is marked *piano* like the orchestra, does that give the soloist enough licence to project this singing theme? It is bel canto but in the Russian style, meaning it's more muscular and energetic, and I think it makes musical sense for it to be mezzo forte from the beginning, in contrast to the syncopated figure in the strings.

Emotional magic

The second statement of the theme at bar 45 opens in an expansive mood, but after only four bars we have a sudden drop in dynamic, which is the first true *piano* of the piece and should sound qualitatively different from anything we've had up to this point. It's such a special moment, and the expressive rising 7th figure becomes a major feature of the movement. As a conductor, Koussevitzky was famous for his attention to detail so when he marks a dynamic terrace from bar 49 I think we have to respect that, otherwise we lose the power and emotional magic of this sequence.

After the glorious forte in bar 53 we are soon led back to *a tempo* in bar 61, and just like the previous times it is marked, it means a return to the tempo from the beginning. This isn't fast – in my experience ♩ =104 is a good speed for the main tempo – and it means that there is no need to rush the triplets. In fact we need real clarity to make the distinction between the minor arpeggio in bar 61 and the major in bar 65.

Deep expression

The tempo increase at bar 69 requires a measured approach. The *più vivo* marking at bar 69 is more 'più' than 'vivo' in my opinion and any temptation to run away with the semiquavers (♪) will undermine the integrity of the thematic material in the orchestra. At first the semiquavers are just an accompaniment but this section finishes quite heroically for the soloist, reaching fortississimo in bar 77 – the only *fff* in the whole piece. This underscores the challenge of this writing: that it follows the gladiatorial model of the concerto – i.e. soloist versus orchestra – and therefore projection has to be uppermost in our mind.

Four bars into the next solo entry, at bar 86, we have one of the most tender moments of the entire concerto with this coaxingly beautiful new theme. Many people have tried to rationalise its place in the structure of the movement, but the problem is it comes too late to be the second subject in sonata form; really, this movement is a series of episodes written by an instrumentalist to show off their technique.

The phrase from bar 86 is like a moment of heavenly reflection and I like to use a bow speed and contact point here that sounds ethereal. By the same token, when the theme is restated in bar 110 it has more intensity so it's good to use a different weight, bow distribution and contact point to reflect that. On top of this, one can add expressive portamentos for maximum emotional effect.

There is a 1929 recording of Koussevitzky playing the second movement of this concerto and, although it was made at a time when he was performing less frequently than he used to, it's a very good historical record of his playing. One has to make the decision over how closely to imitate his liberal approach to portamento, given current taste and technical advancement. I tend to build portamento into the fingerings to obviate the danger of using too much. Its judicious use highlights the emotional content or amplifies certain qualities of the music – so fingerings become tools of expression rather than technical considerations.

Corrections

Tobias Glöckler has incorporated into this edition the different versions of articulation, and even notes that exist in previous editions and in received performance practice. With the correction of the G naturals to G sharps in bar 131 he has rectified what many of us knew to be an error. This way it is a logical sequence, and you don't have to change the orchestral parts to make it fit. In the end, it is musical good sense that will take you in the right direction.

The coda, with its captivating double-stops, begins at bar 128. It's tempting to race away here and turn it into some sort of virtuosic spectacle, but it isn't that. Once again, there is a tempo marking and the power of this coda will come from great rhythmic integrity, clear articulation and coherent phrasing. It allows for perfect ensemble with the orchestra and it is that tension with the accompaniment that will lend the heroic element that everybody craves.

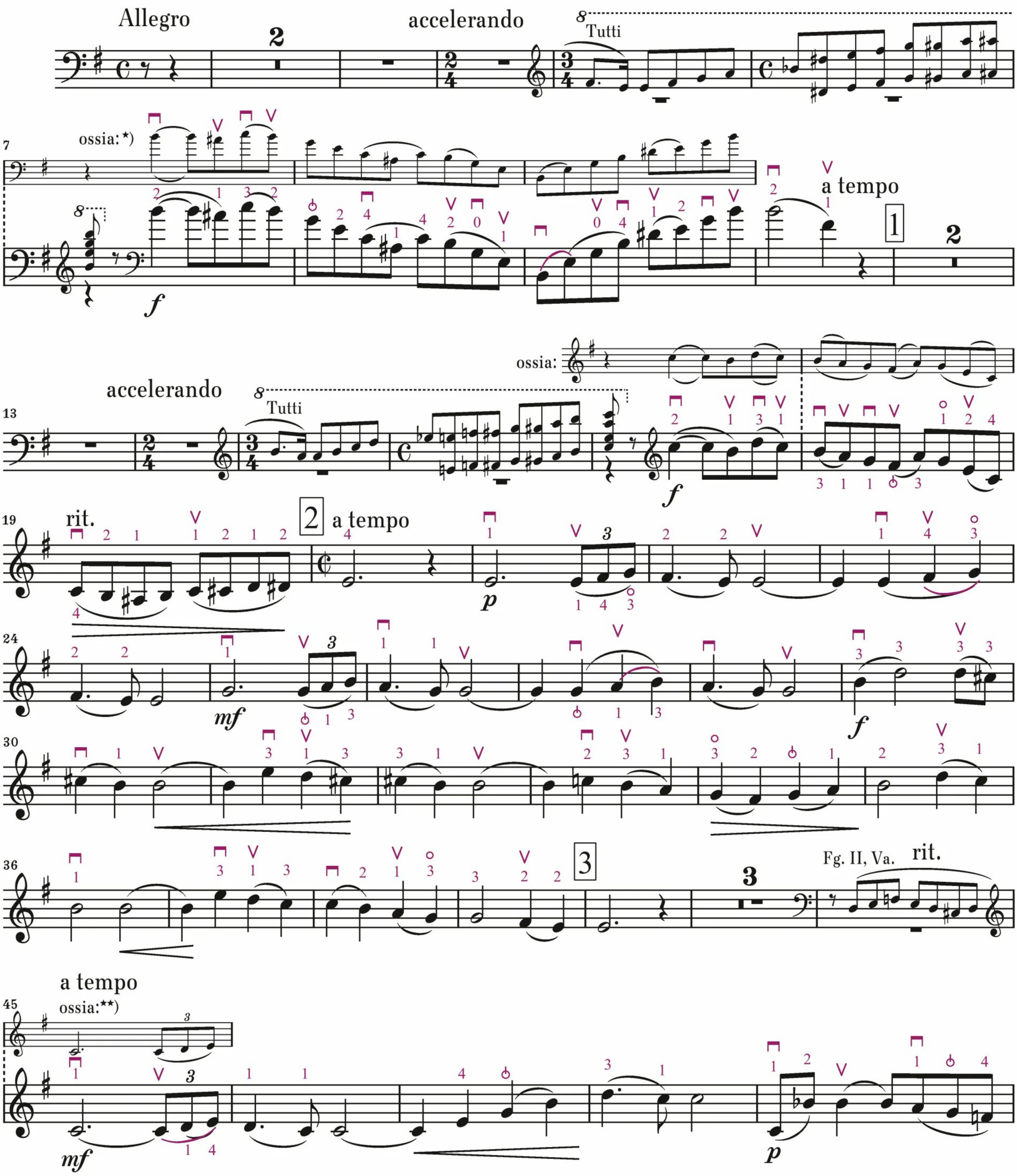
An authentic voice

The question of how much Glière helped in the writing of this piece is often raised. However, it so much reflects the way Koussevitzky played and the unique way he understood the double bass, and this becomes clear if you compare it to his other works for bass and piano. It is material of great emotional power, and it suits the instrument extraordinarily well. Nobody but such a virtuoso could write as well for the double bass.

Around the world, people are keen to make judgements about the quality of music written for double bass, but my contention is that it is not up to us to do that. Our role as performers is to execute the composer's intentions faithfully and with enough skill to affect people's emotions. That is what being a virtuoso is all about. ▷

INTERVIEW BY HELENA RUINARD

Konzert

Kontrabass **Entstanden 1904** **Opus 3**

*) Abweichende Artikulation in der Erstausgabe des Klavierauszugs in eingelegter Solostimme (über dem Ossia-System angegeben) bzw. in Klavierpartitur (unter dem System), so auch in T. 17 f.
Zu Varianten der Nebenquellen siehe *Vorwort* und *Bemerkungen*.

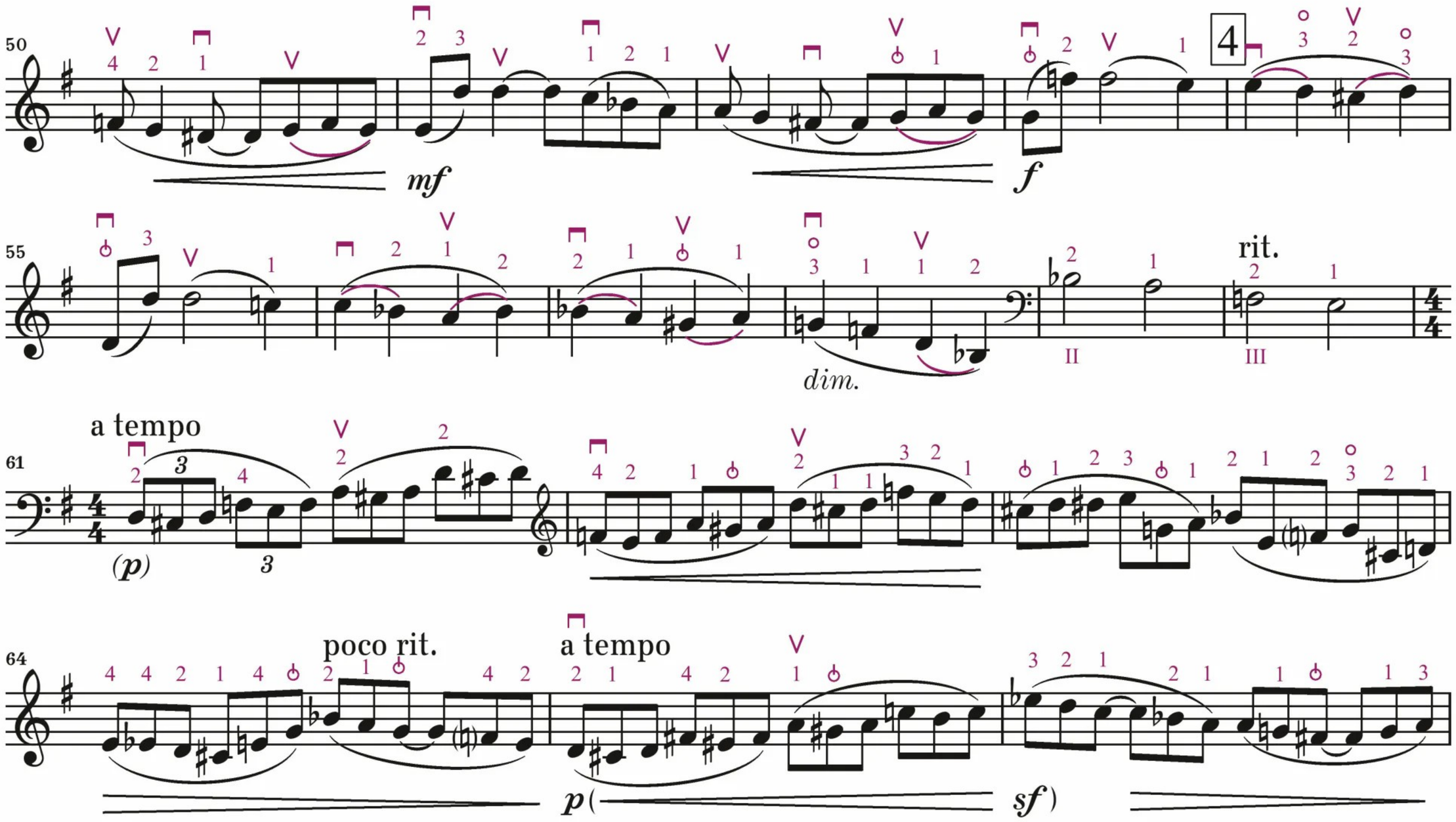
**) Variante der Erstausgabe.

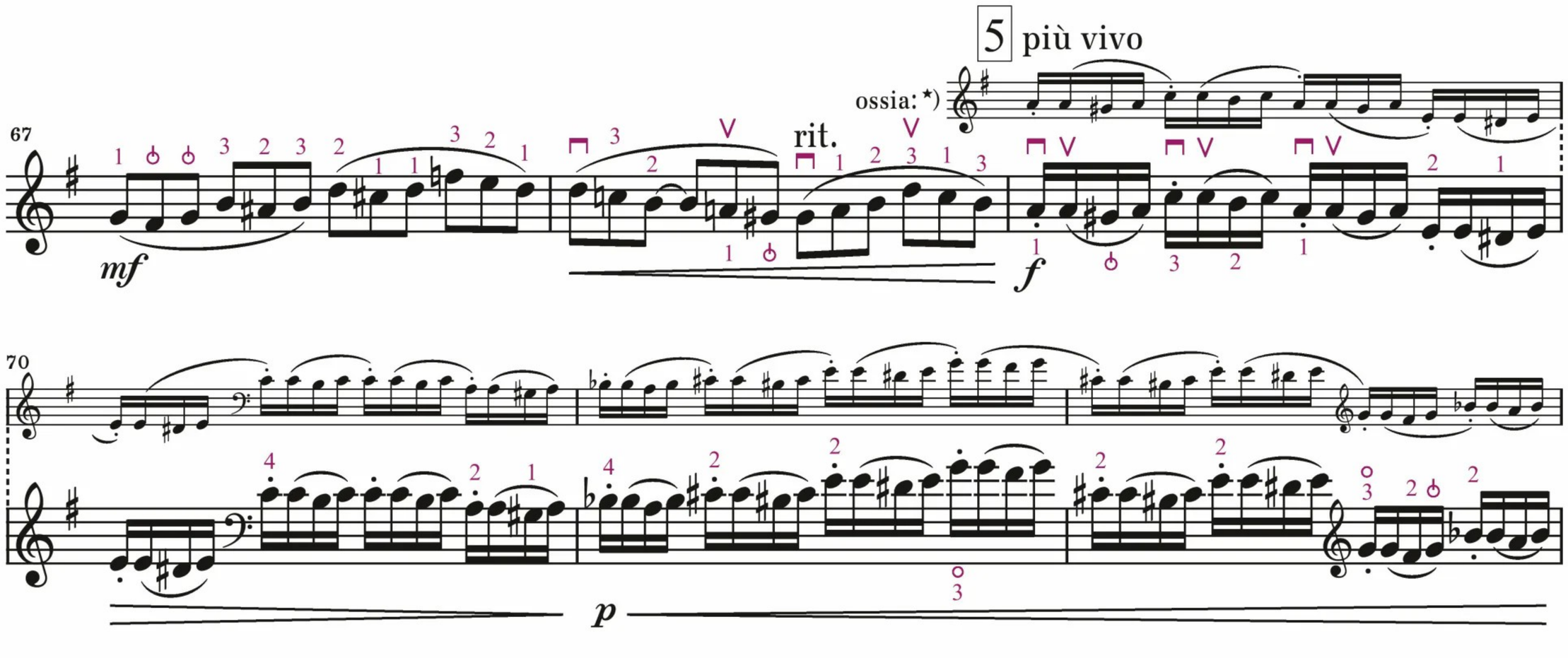
*) Divergent articulation in the solo part inserted in the first edition of the piano reduction (given here above the *ossia* staff) and in the piano score (below the staff); also thus in mm. 17 f.
See the *Preface* and *Comments* regarding variants in the secondary sources.

**) Variant in the first edition.

*) Articulation différente dans la partie de soliste insérée dans la première édition de la réduction pour piano (indiquée au-dessus de la portée ossia), resp. dans la partition de piano (sous la portée), également ainsi aux mes. 17 s.
Voir la *Préface* et les *Bemerkungen* ou *Comments* concernant les variantes dans les sources secondaires.

**) Variante de la première édition.





⋆) Artikulation in der Solostimme der Erstausgabe.

⋆) Articulation in the solo part of the first edition.

⋆) Articulation dans la partie de soliste de la première édition.

82 *ff* rit. a tempo *p*

88

94 7 *f* ( )

99 rit. poco tranquillo *mf* *p* ( )

104

109 rit. a tempo *mf* 8

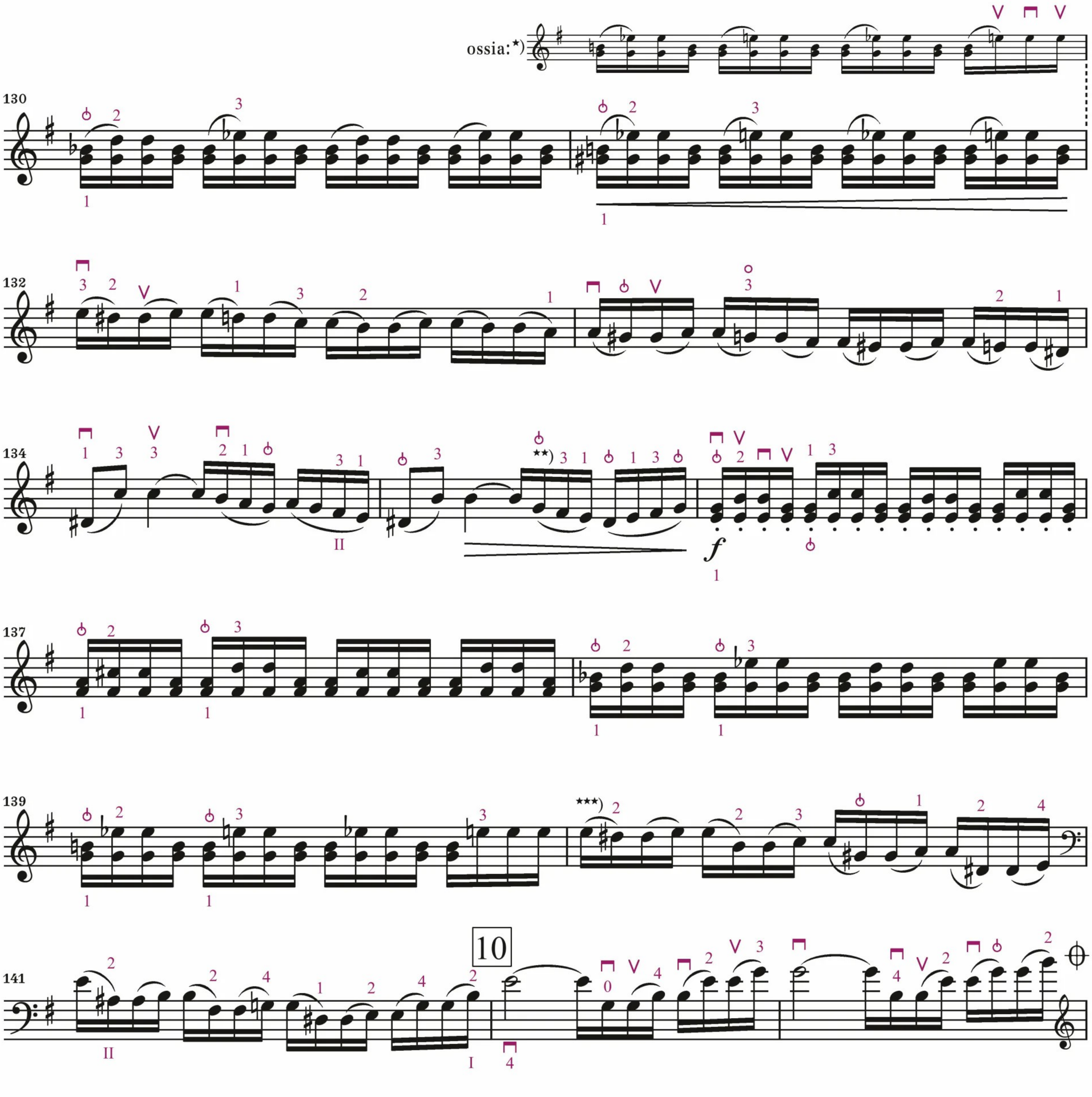
115 *f* *ff*

121 rit.

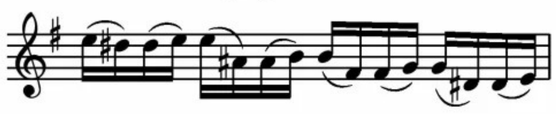
128 9 (a tempo) *f*

⋆) In der Solostimme der Erstausgabe *eis*[1] statt *dis*[1]; siehe *Bemerkungen*.

⋆) The solo part in the first edition has e♯[1] instead of *d*♯[1]; see the *Comments*.

⋆) Dans la partie de soliste de la première édition, *mi*♯[1] au lieu de *ré*♯[1]; voir les *Bemerkungen* ou *Comments*.

*) Variante der Erstausgabe, Ausführung nur mit Änderung in Fagott II und Violoncello möglich; siehe *Bemerkungen*.

**) In der Erstausgabe a^1–g^1–fis^1 statt g^1–fis^1–e^1.

***) In den Quellen wohl irrtümlich e-moll (gegen a-moll im Orchester):
The sources, probably in error, have e minor (against a minor in the orchestra):
Dans les sources, mi mineur (contre la mineur à l'orchestre), probablement par erreur:

****) Zu alternativem Schluss siehe *Bemerkungen*.

*) Variant in the first edition; only possible in performance when a change is made to bassoon II and cello; see the *Comments*.

**) The first edition has a^1–g^1–$f\sharp^1$ instead of g^1–$f\sharp^1$–e^1.

****) See the *Comments* regarding the alternative ending.

*) Variante de la première édition, exécution possible uniquement avec adaptation des parties de basson II et de violoncelle; voir les *Bemerkungen* ou *Comments*.

**) Dans la première édition la^1–sol^1–$fa\sharp^1$ au lieu de sol^1–$fa\sharp^1$–mi^1.

****) Voir les *Bemerkungen* ou *Comments* concernant la fin alternative.

TECHNIQUE

The big time

Tips for making the switch from violin to viola

STEPHEN KING
Teacher of viola at Elder Conservatorium of Music, University of Adelaide, Australia

BORN
Lansing, MI, US

STUDIED WITH
Elizabeth Morgan, James Dunham, Michael Tree, Katherine Murdock

TEACHES
Conservatoire students and younger players (12+)

It is well known that many violists decide to switch to the instrument only after they have studied the violin for some years. Besides the obvious issue of the clef change, there are other important adjustments to be taken into consideration. The physical size of the instrument necessitates a different approach to the balance of the body and each hand to enable the player to draw fully into the string to create a good core sound.

In their efforts to produce a big sound, students who are new to the viola tend to muscle in, forcing the sound, rather than using natural weight. They exert pressure from the shoulder, using it as a driver. This results in a somewhat sketchy sound because they are only able to access the upper partials from the surface of the string, whereas they need to connect with the resistance in the string when they are drawing the sound.

Many students coming from the violin also have a tendency to be rather 'first-finger centric'; after all, most beginners start with the first finger. An over-reliance on positioning the thumb behind the first finger often results in poor hand balance, leading to intonation and vibrato issues on the viola because the other fingers are too far from the string and can't anticipate what needs to be played. Fourth finger is seen as a bit of a stretch, and students tend to avoid it, fingering their music accordingly. However, if the left hand is balanced from the fourth finger with a more mobile thumb, this frees up what they can do, especially if they have small hands or short arms.

Violists sit between the violins and the cellos and can learn from both.

EXERCISES

Bowing arm – finding the core of the sound

- Reduce any tension by connecting with the natural weight of your arm. Drop your shoulders, release your muscles and cradle your right arm in your left to feel its weight.
- To transfer the weight into the string your bow hold needs to be supple, flexible and balanced.

To awaken your knowledge of the range of possibilities with this new-found gravitational weight, experiment by playing with extremes: for example, too much weight too close to the bridge, and too slow a bow.

- Try the following exercise from American pedagogue Karen Tuttle. Standing, lean right over, and play a sonorous passage on one of your lower strings while upside down. This frees your shoulders, meaning that you experience the weight of your arms in a totally different way. Once you have felt this, stand up, lift your arms by engaging your back muscles, and play the passage again. Observe the difference in your sound.
- Scales in one position shouldn't be underrated. Play slow scales pulling on the left-hand side of the string on the down bows and the right-hand side of the string on the up bows. As you play listen out for the resonance that is gained by the best intonation.

JACQUI WAY

Left hand

- The fourth finger is not as weak as we often think; to feel its potential, support your scroll on a music stand. Make a fist with the thumb outside. Release the base knuckles and use the four curved fingers to hang off the neck of the viola without the thumb, feeling gravity's effect on the arm. Release the first three fingers and feel the hang off the fourth finger alone.
- Try **exercise 1**, from viola pedagogue Elizabeth Morgan, designed to open the hand back rather than stretching it up. Think of the fourth finger as the foundation. As you play, keep a tunnel in the fingers. Keep them down as much as possible (or close to the string), to economise on movement. **Figure 1** is the starting point showing curved fingers (all semitones), a heavy arm and a balanced and relaxed opposing thumb. Allow your thumb the freedom to crawl up and down the neck to balance your fingers.
- By the time you reach the end of the exercise note that the fingers extend back, but there is still a strong fourth finger. The thumb has moved a little to balance the hand, as shown in **figure 2**.

EXERCISE 1 This exercise is designed to open the hand back rather than stretching it up

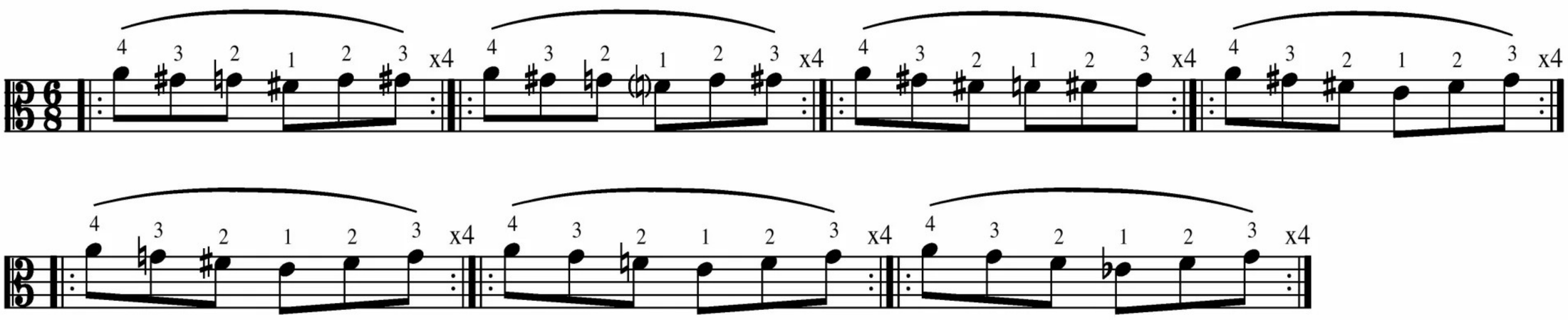


FIGURE 1 Finger position at the starting point

FIGURE 2 Position at the end point

Practise scales from the fourth finger coming down, or on one string using 3, 4, 3, 4, 3, 4 fingering (up and down). Keep your mind focused on the balance of the fingers with the thumb, which should be relaxed and mobile.

REPERTOIRE

For **example 1** (see next page), Karen Tuttle's upside-down trick (see bowing arm exercises) works brilliantly. Use it to play with an open and focused sound without forcing the right-hand shoulder; the playing needs to be incisive to cut through the texture.

In **example 2**, a section of passagework from Stamitz's Viola Concerto, rebalancing your left hand towards the fourth finger will help enormously.

And finally, these two practice techniques come together in the Walton (**example 3**), where you need a strong core to the sound, keeping a free shoulder and an agile, prepared left hand. ▹

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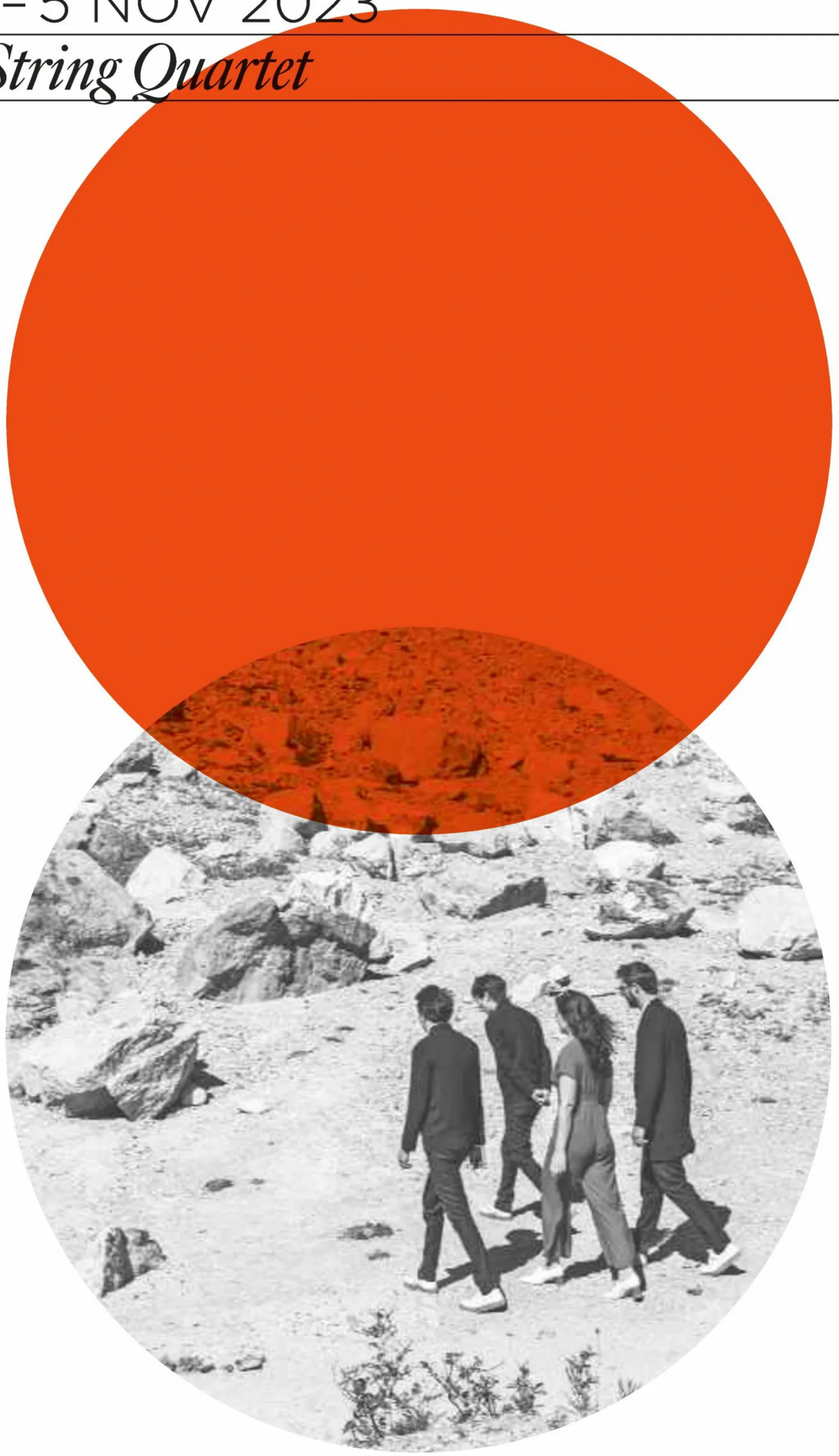

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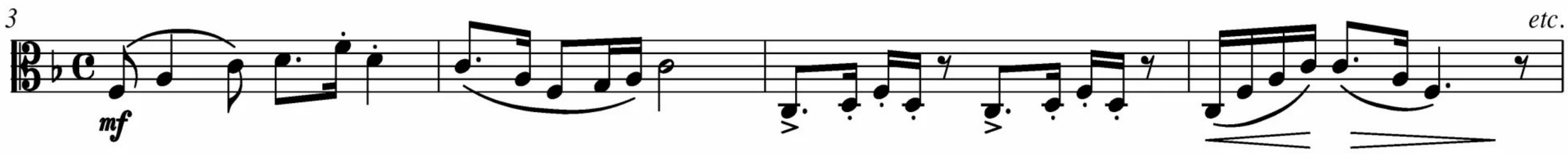
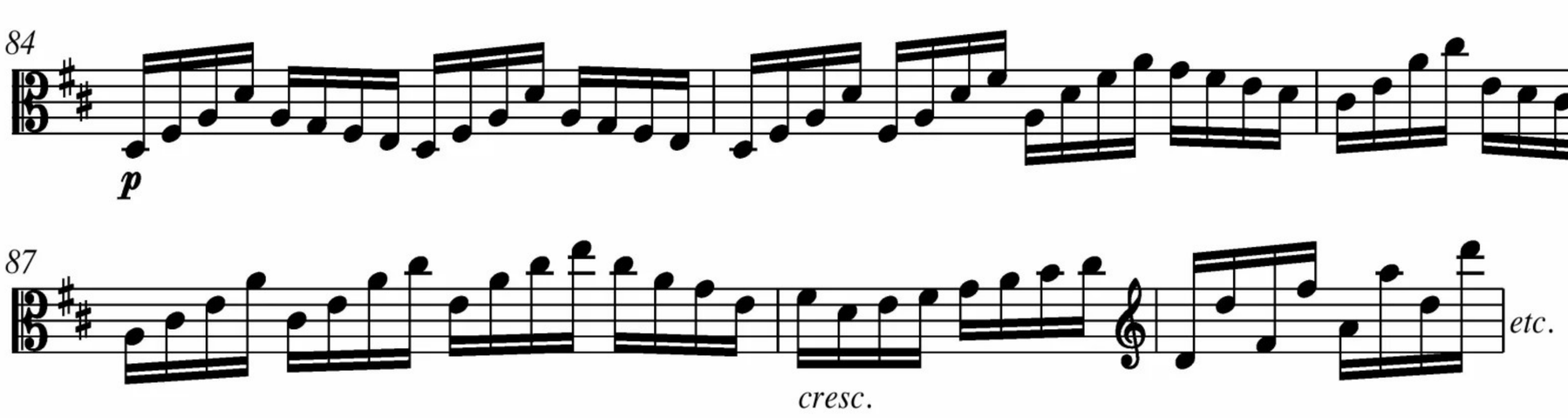
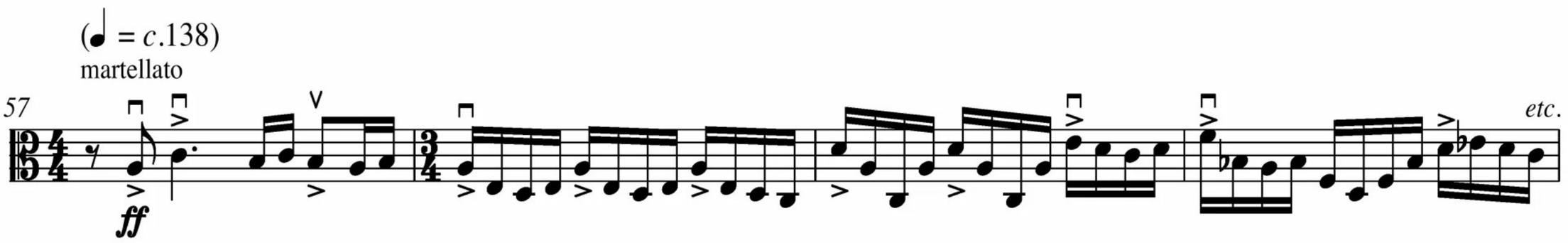
EXAMPLE 1 From Dvořák's String Quartet in F major 'American' op.96, first movement

EXAMPLE 2 From Stamitz's Viola Concerto in D major op.1, first movement



EXAMPLE 3 From Walton's Viola Concerto, first movement

IN YOUR PRACTICE

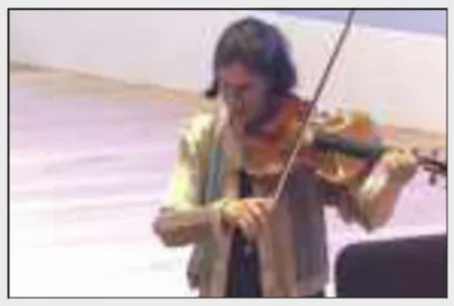
- Quality is much more important than quantity
- Come to your practice with a goal in mind, however small, and stay focused
- Always listen carefully to your sound as you practise; your right-hand thumb should be soft and flexible, with your fingers wrapped softly over the bow stick
- It is important to go easy with the left-hand fourth finger exercises, especially when starting to work on them. Do a little then return to it later in your practice.
- When working on the mobility of your thumb be patient with yourself on intonation. Your default 'anchor' has gone and it may take a while to get used to the new balance of the hand.

TIPS FOR TEACHERS

- Aim to be agile and inventive
- Demonstrate in your lessons and encourage students to listen to great violists
- Make it clear what you want to hear in the next lesson
- Encourage students to come up with their own fingerings, then discuss in the lesson. What suits one student won't suit another, and different violas have different tonal characteristics.
- It is always good to know when to stop. If something isn't getting through, move on, then return to it at a future point from another angle. Sometimes new ideas, especially freedom in the left-hand thumb, can take a while to percolate through.
- Feedback from another teacher can be useful and make things click for the student

INTERVIEW BY NAOMI YANDELL

FURTHER MATERIALS



Viola pedagogue Karen Tuttle continues to be inspirational in this video. I recommend watching this Viola Vision video, in which Kim Kashkashian talks through the Karen Tuttle Legacy. Here is a live stream from 2019 on the 'New World' Symphony (starts at 8:00min).
bitly.ws/Pq6v

NEXT MONTH
Cellist Alexander Baillie on exploring sound options with the bow

Reviews

Your monthly critical round-up of performances, recordings and publications

CONCERTS

THIS MONTH'S RECOMMENDED RECORDINGS
Our pick of the new releases

The Emerson Quartet: an uncompromising farewell
PAGE 83

Back to the Baroque for Isabelle Faust
PAGE 86

Scintillating Mozart from Capucon and Armstrong
PAGE 87

New York

Gil Shaham: in tune with his young colleagues

GIL SHAHAM (VIOLIN) NATIONAL YOUTH ORCHESTRA OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA/ANDREW DAVIS

CARNEGIE HALL 14 JULY 2023

Wearing the same black sneakers as the musicians on stage, Gil Shaham exuded playfulness and camaraderie with his young colleagues (aged 16 to 19) in the National Youth Orchestra of the United States of America, led by Andrew Davis. As soloist in Barber's Violin Concerto, Shaham brought his inherent sweetness to the role, which moved my listening companion to tears. If, at the opening of the rocketing finale, it took a few moments to settle on appropriate tempos (temptation abounds to exceed speed limits), ultimately agreement was reached, with the climaxes wrought in brilliant colours.

Introducing *Isolation Rag* (2020), a solo written for the violinist by Scott Wheeler, Shaham recalled that the Boston-based composer emailed it to him after acknowledging the effects of the pandemic on concert life. An ideal encore, it had a moodiness that might have made Scott Joplin happy.

For the two other works – *Giants of Light*, a world premiere by Valerie Coleman, and Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* – the enormous string contingent radiated youthful enthusiasm. (One eager cellist may likely want to tone down his thrashing head movements, to avoid future neck injuries.) Under Davis's encouraging yet calm leadership, the musicians unleashed waves of excitement for the Coleman. In the Berlioz, there was no one who seemed to mind that balances were occasionally off, because the players found so much to revel in, given the work's utter weirdness. As an encore, we had the final March from Hindemith's *Symphonic Metamorphosis of Themes by Carl Maria von Weber*, and its fireworks seemed ideally suited to the occasion.

BRUCE HODGES

CHRIS LEE

To browse through more than a decade of *The Strad*'s recording reviews, visit **www.thestrad.com/reviews**

JENNIFER KOH (VIOLIN) NYO2/JOSEPH YOUNG

CARNEGIE HALL 15 JULY 2023

At the interval during this outing by NYO2 (the younger of the two Weill Music Institute youth orchestras, members aged 14 to 17), a dozen violinists – all clad in the ensemble's black T-shirts, scarlet trousers and black trainers – posed for a selfie on the Carnegie Hall stage. Their enthusiasm, shepherded by conductor Joseph Young, was shared by hundreds of onlookers in the audience.

Jennifer Koh, the fearless soloist in Sibelius's Violin Concerto, carried over that energy but seemed ultimately overwhelmed by the work's demands. The result was some insecure intonation and, through no fault of her own, a sense of being swamped by the sheer sound from the gigantic ensemble.

The orchestra showed its strengths better in the opener, 'Three Dance Episodes' from Bernstein's *On the Town*, again channelling that unalloyed teenage spirit. But it saved the best for last, in selections from Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet*. It's worth noting that the commitment gave hints of how the players might infuse orchestras or chamber-music ensembles in the future. It's also worth reminding readers that young players often have not acquired instruments of a professional calibre, with commensurate tonal sumptuousness. But in this case, it hardly mattered.

For encores, Young led a jazzy spin on Carlos Simon's 'Holy Dance' from *Four Black American Dances* (2023), commissioned by the Boston Symphony Orchestra. And after Young announced that the group's first stop on its upcoming tour would be the Dominican Republic, a merengue appeared: *Caña Brava* (1988) by Antonio Abreu.

BRUCE HODGES

Bowdoin

PETER WINOGRAD, JANET YING (VIOLINS) REBECCA ALBERS, PHILLIP YING, DIMITRI MURRATH (VIOLAS) STEVEN DOANE (CELLO) PEI-SHAN LEE (PIANO)

LIVE STREAM FROM STUDZINSKI HALL, BOWDOIN, MAINE 5 JULY 2023

Cellist Steven Doane gave a beautiful introduction to an appreciative audience at the Bowdoin Music Festival, comparing Bach's keyboard and string writing and illuminating his E flat major Cello Suite for the audience. He chose a judicious tempo for the Prelude, which allowed for extremely clean string-crossings, and a graceful Allemande gave way to an almost stately Courante. Despite Doane's Romantic approach to vibrato in the earlier movements, the Sarabande was well balanced and boasted pristine intonation in the chords and double-stops; the bourrées and closing Gigue were rustic but never out of control.

The rich sound and masterful touch of violist Dimitri Murrath brought character and depth to Schumann's A minor Violin Sonata op.105: in his hands it worked convincingly on the viola. In the Allegretto he relished its dramatic character shifts, and Murrath's ability to negotiate his instrument with ease and grace was impressive in the final Lebhaft.

Mozart's joyful C major String Quintet K515 made a delightful end to the programme and was marvellously performed by Peter Winograd, Janet Ying, Rebecca Albers, Phillip Ying and Steven Doane. Winograd led the group well, with his sweet sound and a welcome variety of colour. Violist Albers stole the show in the Andante and the entire work had an infectiously light-hearted feel.

LEAH HOLLINGSWORTH

YING QUARTET

STUDZINSKI HALL, BOWDOIN, MAINE 10 JULY 2023

Flanked by scores of eager audience members on stage, the Ying Quartet walked out to wild applause and whooping for this appearance at the Bowdoin International Music Festival where it is quartet-in-residence. But the hubbub evaporated when the players raised their bows for Mozart's Quartet no.22 K589, with the first movement ambling along at a

A rapturous reception for the Ying Quartet

MICHELLE STAPLETON

leisurely pace; the Larghetto had a ghostly nostalgia and the Menuet plenty of grace. As we reached the finale, the crowd noise resumed: it was inspiring to see such genuine enthusiasm.

Violist Phillip Ying introduced Kevin Puts's *Dark Vigil* (1999), a work written in reaction to the waves of school violence that were taking place at the time; Ying and his siblings met Puts when they were students at Eastman. With slow-moving chords, interrupted by more agitated writing, long sequences of a few simple notes flowed from player to player, as if to recall those students, teachers and parents caught in a sad, endless cycle. After the gentle, consolatory ending, the audience reacted with sustained applause, drawing the foursome out for another bow.

Dvořák's 13th Quartet is a real workout, akin to an hour at the gym – that is, if your gym had a gorgeous Czech soundtrack – yet the musicians made it look effortless. A soaring second movement only highlighted the surrounding extroversion, and some calculatedly coarse lunges in the third movement offered an element of surprise. For the uninhibited finale, the group maintained its balance and rhythmic precision, with the final bars especially spine-tingling as the music accelerated toward the end.

BRUCE HODGES

Glasgow

THIRTEEN NORTH
ST LUKE'S 29 JUNE 2023

It's not every week you get to experience the birth of a new string group, let alone a 13-player mini-orchestra. So the launch of Thirteen North, at trendy Glasgow bar/eatery/venue St Luke's, felt like a bit of an occasion for music in Scotland, if not the wider UK.

Thirteen North: more music and less talk

In the end, though, the performance raised more questions than it answered. For a start: why wasn't there more music? After a beautifully delivered though lengthy support set of South American tunes from violin-and-guitar duo Escocia, Thirteen North's own set boiled down to Bartók's *Divertimento* plus three short commissioned pieces (and quite a lot of talk). It felt somewhat frustrating, since the group's Bartók was gutsy and thoroughly committed – a near-ideal blend of elegant classical precision and raw folky authenticity, reflecting the players' roots in both classical and traditional musics. You had to wonder, though, whether the piece really needed amplification in such an intimate space.

The ensemble's three new pieces set out to explore various aspects of connection – across the ages in Pippa Murphy's elegant, sonorous and refreshingly simple Burns-inspired *Ca' the Yowes tae Humbie*, and across great distances in North Uist-based Pàdruig Morrison's powerful *These Highland Glens Once Danced*, remembering the culture lost to the Clearances. The brief films from Glasgow-based Bircan Birol that prefaced each new work proved to be little more video programme notes. There were a few disturbances in the concert, too, with chattering cameramen capturing the event for posterity and a photographer prowling among the audience.

Ultimately, it felt like a perplexingly meagre mouthful of what Thirteen North could undoubtedly achieve in musical terms, rather than a satisfying meal, and one with quite a lot of distractions too. Let's hope it dares to go unplugged, without mics, cameras, films and support act, and let its performances speak for themselves.

DAVID KETTLE

London

HILARY HAHN (VIOLIN)
KALEIDOSCOPE CHAMBER COLLECTIVE
WIGMORE HALL 20 JUNE 2023

Hilary Hahn concluded her Wigmore Hall residency with a concert of all-American repertoire for diverse forces. First was Carlos Simon's piano trio, *be still and know* (2015) with pianist Tom Poster and cellist Tony Rymer, its serenely reflective wide-spaced chords and polytonality – capped by a single, dissonant, questioning, piano 'plink' – mesmerisingly referenced Copland's *Appalachian Spring*. Next, Jennifer Higdon's *Dark Wood* (2001) was a feisty cornucopia of extended techniques pitting Amy Harmen's bassoon against Poster, Hahn and cellist Laura van der Heijden. Then Barber's String Quartet, Rymer back on cello, with violist

ELLY LUCAS

Hilary Hahn and Kaleidoscope: a fitting finale

Juan-Miguel Hernandez and Elena Urioste on second violin received a reading that reached fever pitch at the Adagio climax.

Jessie Montgomery's *Starburst* (2012) – all the above strings players plus violinists Melissa White, Nathan Amaral and Graham Mitchell, violist Rosalind Ventris and bassist Graham Mitchell – sounded as per its title. Then finally Poster returned, plus clarinettist Carlos Ferreira and flautist Jane Mitchell, for *Appalachian Spring*; this was a performance full of polished warmth, generosity and a palpable pleasure in the music's beauty and energy. There had been a crescendo of cheers all evening, but now came a rare Wigmore Hall standing ovation, answered by a tutti encore – Poster's own *Moon River* arrangement, despatched with Hollywood-esque glossiness. In short, what a night!

CHARLOTTE GARDNER

THOMAS REIF (VIOLIN) SEBASTIAN KLINGER (CELLO) SEBASTIAN MANZ (CLARINET) ALICE SARA OTT (PIANO)

PURCELL ROOM 22 JUNE 2023

Many composers have written with particular players in mind. How fortunate for Messiaen that, even among the grimness of a Second World War prison camp, he could find three other musicians on whom he could make the extraordinary technical and musical demands of his *Quatuor pour la fin du temps*.

The piece was well served in an early-evening concert, with violinist Thomas Reif, concertmaster of the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, cellist Sebastian Klinger, until recently also from the BRSO, along with clarinettist Sebastian Manz of the SWR Symphony Orchestra and the famously bare-footed pianist Alice Sara Ott. The musicians gave a memorable performance: Klinger, in his solo movement 'Louange' (the fifth) with Ott, and Reif with his own 'Louange' to end the work, were sublime; their long, slow meditations imbued with quiet rapture and beauty. Together the four of them kicked up an alarming storm as the apocalypse approached: the unison 'Danse de la Fureur' (the sixth movement) had remarkable intensity and accuracy. Elsewhere there were delicacy and subtle colours as Messiaen evoked birds and rainbows, and passages of blissful serenity. The foursome did it again an hour later: it is not often that the world ends twice in one day.

TIM HOMFRAY

GUILDHALL CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL

MILTON COURT CONCERT HALL 9 JULY 2023

This was the final concert in a weekend festival given by Guildhall School musicians, sometimes, as here, joined by professors.

Featuring two students and two staff, Frank Bridge's *Phantasy* for piano quartet lived up to its title, with a hint of dark magic in the melodic first movement and an eerie flicker in the scherzo-like second. Forming a somewhat symmetrical programme, two trio pieces were then followed by a return to an upscaled ensemble. Duruflé's *Prélude, récitatif et variations* for viola, flute and piano brought a touching dialogue between flautist Rachel Watson and violist Gary Pomeroy (the latter a staffer), both standing to play. Pianist Thomas Eeckhout (a student) nicely drew the whole together.

Former LSO principal clarinet Andrew Marriner was joined by two highly accomplished students – Yunzhe Wu (violin) and David Palmer (piano) – for a performance of Bartók's *Contrasts* that drew concentrated intensity from what can seem quite abstract music.

Complementing Bridge's *Phantasy*, Elgar's Piano Quintet featured three students, including both violinists, with Jacqueline Monteiro following first violinist Violetta Suvini, sticking like a limpet when required. The highlight was the daringly slow Adagio, with a real sense of sweep, no drag and a powerful combined body of sound.

EDWARD BHESANIA

THE WIGMORE HALL TRUST

Reviews

RECORDINGS

ALFANO String quartets: no.1 in D major (1924 version), no.2 in Tre Tempi Collegati in C major, no.3 in G minor
Elmira Darvarova, Mary Ann Mumm (violins) Craig Mumm (viola) Samuel Magill (cello)
NAXOS 8.579042

Characterful chamber music from the man who completed *Turandot*

These are world-premiere recordings of Italian composer Franco Alfano's three quartets, which deserve to be better known. The first of them, written during the First World War, opens with busy, forceful writing, played here with emotional urgency and aggressive energy, bright-toned and gritty. The second-movement Calmo includes a plangent viola solo, played with affecting simplicity by Craig Mumm; the players give a gentle, fluid account of Alfano's melancholy writing. The busyness of the opening movement is ramped up in the finale, with all four players engaging in a heated dialogue before subsiding into something lush and strange.

The Second Quartet, from ten years later, occupies a different world. The opening Largo, severe, sparse and slow-moving, is played with quiet, meditative intensity. The second movement (headed 'Like a children's song') offers music of delicate faux naivety and the third is a stomping set of rustic dances played with compelling idiomatic character and colour.

Another Largo opens the Third Quartet, an emotionally concentrated and intimate threnody. The Allegretto is a light, lopsided modal dance, much of it in 7/4, and the finale is brisk and boisterous, played with high good humour. The recording is clean and warm.

TIM HOMFRAY

THE UNDISCOVERED VIOLA D'AMORE
ANON Partitas: B minor; G major **GÖTZ** and **FUCHS** 26 Galanteries – excerpts **HEINICHEN** Trio Sonata in F major
Paul V. Miller (viola d'amore) Chatham Baroque
CENTAUR CRC4025

Newly discovered manuscripts prompt virtuoso performances

This fascinating recording draws on two recently discovered collections of music for viola d'amore. Manuscript HS4806 from the library at Göttweig Abbey in Lower Austria includes 24 anonymous partitas written around 1700 in a style reminiscent of Biber's violin compositions. About a century later, a series of 26 unaccompanied pieces by the Moravia-based virtuosos Josef Fuchs and Franz Götz was compiled in a manuscript now preserved at the National Museum in Prague. Despite its apparently lightweight title – *Galanteries* – and straightforward musical language, the latter collection requires an uncommon degree of virtuosity from the performer. In their own way, they might be compared to the capriccios of Locatelli or indeed Paganini!

Paul V. Miller is just such a virtuoso, taking the intricate double-stopping with disarming ease and dead-on intonation – even when tackling an E flat minor piece on an instrument tuned in D major! The closely balanced recording even seems to catch the resonance of the instrument's sympathetic strings, particularly in Götz's haunting *Flagioletto Solo*, a tour de force to be played almost exclusively in harmonics, which ring freely in Miller's hands. The Göttweig partitas and Heinichen's slightly later Trio Sonata don't demand comparable

technical feats but feature stumbling blocks of their own, each of them requiring a different tuning based on the piece's key. Here Chatham Baroque joins in for a colourful realisation of the continuo parts, its violinist Andrew Fouts effectively sharing the limelight with Miller in the trio.

CARLOS MARÍA SOLARE

FROM METHOD TO MADNESS
Works by **Barber, Bunch, Foss** and **Newman**
Clancy Newman (cello) Natalie Zhu (piano)
ALBANY RECORDS TROY1935

Extroversion is to the fore in this all-American album

On the strength of this energising new disc, New York-born cellist, composer, teacher and writer Clancy Newman has a remarkable perspective on performance. He brings together a muscularity so vivid it almost borders on the theatrical with an astonishing sense of precision and purity to his sound. The direct, dramatic result finds an ideal match in the strongly characterful music on this all-American disc – even if, ironically, not all of the works here are especially compelling themselves.

Newman shapes the grand, arching melodic lines in Barber's early Cello Sonata beautifully, with a silky sweetness to its more lyrical music, expertly conveying the composer's extroversion. His agility and precision come into their own in Lukas Foss's freewheeling, often humorous Capriccio, and if he might make the composer's unpredictable invention sound a touch too easy, his account is nonetheless big on character and spirit. Kenji Bunch's jazzy, poppy

To browse through more than a decade of *The Strad*'s recording reviews, visit **www.thestrad.com/reviews**

Broken Music gets a committed, thoughtful reading, with Newman driving its rhythms along with unrelenting energy. His own concluding *From Method to Madness* encapsulates the two sides to his performing personality, beginning as a strictly controlled, study-like workout before erupting in Latin exuberance.

There's plenty to savour in Newman's infectiously enthusiastic playing. It's a shame, then, that the recording levels so often place pianist Natalie Zhu – herself on exceptionally characterful form – so forward in the mix that she sometimes obscures the detail of his playing.

DAVID KETTLE

INFINITE VOYAGE

BERG String Quartet op.3 **CHAUSSON** Chanson perpétuelle op.37 **HINDEMITH** Melancholie op.13 **SCHOENBERG** String Quartet no.2 in F sharp minor op.10

Emerson Quartet, Barbara Hannigan (soprano) Bertrand Chamayou (piano)

ALPHA ALPHA1000

An affecting farewell from one of the major quartets of today

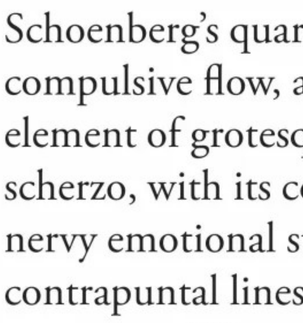
Here is the final recording from the Emerson Quartet, after a career of 47 years. The main work, placed last, is Schoenberg's Second Quartet, with soprano Barbara Hannigan, who also features in two other works here. This is a terrific, challenging valediction. The disc opens with Hindemith's *Melancholie*, settings of poems by Christian Morgenstern. The composer gives his own instrument, the viola, a good workout here, well met by Lawrence Dutton, to match the purity of Hannigan's singing.

Berg's String Quartet op.3 is played with meticulous clarity and accuracy, illuminating the enormous wealth of detail and the long lines of his complex narrative. Chausson's *Chanson perpétuelle* is a setting of another doleful poem, by Charles Cros, for which Hannigan and the Emerson are joined by pianist Bertrand Chamayou, in playing of appropriate *tendresse*, supple and atmospheric.

The first movement of Schoenberg's quartet has a compulsive flow, and there is an element of grotesque comedy to the scherzo, with its constant shifts of nervy emotional states. The contrapuntal lines of the third-movement 'Litanei' are finely shaped, with Hannigan embedded as if part of a great chamber quintet. The passing of the arabesque lines that open the last movement is perfectly done, and, as Hannigan evokes Stefan George's 'air from another planet', the five of them do indeed conjure something eerie and wholly captivating. The recording is forensically clear.

TIM HOMFRAY

MATHIEU AMALRIC



BRUCH Violin Concerto no.1 in G minor **PRICE** Violin Concerto no.1 in D major; Violin Concerto no.2; Adoration

Randall Goosby (violin) Philadelphia Orchestra/ Yannick Nézet-Séguin

DECCA 4854234

Last month's cover star impresses in an innovative pairing

Randall Goosby, a violinist whose star is very much in the ascendant, opens this recording with a wonderfully assured and lustrous performance of Bruch's First Violin Concerto. But interest centres on the rest of the repertoire here, the two concertos by the black American composer Florence Price (plus *Adoration*, a short work given with some beautiful, syrupy double-stopping, which serves as a gorgeous sign-off).

Price's First Concerto is a curious work: it was written in 1939 when she was in her early fifties and it leans heavily on Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto, with almost literal quotations, combined with the pentatonicism of the spirituals she often used ('Nobody knows the trouble I've seen' seems to peek out at times). Goosby, always responsive to the composer's weaving lines, is as persuasive an advocate as could be

Doing it their way: the Emerson's final recording session, with Barbara Hannigan and Bertrand Chamayou

hoped for, his tone always warm and expressive; the virtuosic moments are given with panache. The second-movement Andante is also in near-spiritual mode, with Goosby lush and articulate, as if singing imaginary lyrics. The final Allegro is light and jaunty, with some sparkling spiccato playing.

The Second Concerto (written in 1952, the year before Price's death) is clearly a more mature work; during its 15-minute duration it ranges far, from caprice to brass-and-percussion drama, with a wealth of memorable melody which Goosby plays with limpid beauty.

TIM HOMFRAY

Amalie Stalheim: an impressive chamber musician

DEBUSSY Cello Sonata **POULENC** Cello Sonata **STRAVINSKY** Suite italienne
Amalie Stalheim (cello)
Christian Ihle Hadland (piano)
LAWO CLASSICS LWC1260

Performances of great immediacy, captured by a first-rate recording

This Norwegian audiophile label makes some of the most dynamically broad and forensically detailed recordings on the market. You can almost hear the grain of the maple on Amalie Stalheim's 1687 Francesco Rugeri in her shaping of the artless melody in the slow movement of Poulenc's Cello Sonata, as well as every hair's breadth variation of her vibrato, and the supportive glow of pianist Christian Ihle Hadland's accompanying chords.

All the same, these are not aridly analytical performances. The finale of the Poulenc is like a mini-Godard movie, endlessly eventful and richly characterised by Stalheim at every madcap turn. This is not 'aristocratic' cello playing in the old sense embodied by Tortelier and Fournier; it is generous of tone and sentiment, reaching out in the opening movement of the Debussy towards a late coming to terms with mortality, through the kind of recitative phrasing on which any Mélisande would colour her lines.

The *Suite italienne* presents another challenge again (the album's contrasts make for a rewarding listen at a single sitting): how to respect the superficial Neoclassicism of Stravinsky's harmony while honouring the true emotions of his commedia dell'arte subjects? Stalheim's approach leans into the colouristic possibilities afforded by the recording and her pianist; her spiccato in the Serenata's reprise, the detaché of the Tarantella and the elegant cantabile of her Menuet all offer pleasure in their own right, and with an intimacy which a high-profile concerto could not emulate.

PETER QUANTRILL

ENESCU EARLY CHAMBER MUSIC
ENESCU Piano Quintet in D major; Prelude and Gavotte; Aubade in C major; Pastorale, Menuet triste et Nocturne; Romanian Rhapsody no.1 (arr. Enoch)
Fine Arts Quartet, Gisele Witkowski, Fabio Witkowski (pianos)
Alexander Bickard (double bass)
NAXOS 8.574487

A welcome chance to explore the early works of a Romanian master

By all accounts, George Enescu was a remarkable musician, with the likes of Casals and Heifetz happy to play with him. Menuhin regarded him as one of the greatest musicians he'd ever met – strong praise indeed. His precocious compositional talents are celebrated here in an enterprising disc of recently published chamber works, including a Piano Quintet which was written when he was only 15. Inevitably in music composed at such a young age, various influences come to the fore, not least Brahms, in what amounts to a light yet melodious Romantic style. It's pleasant fare, but what Enescu already demonstrates is a tremendous compositional fluency at handling more extended material. The Fine Arts Quartet is impressive, with finely honed phrasing and good characterisation, while the two pianists offer elegant support. Of the very early works, the expressively performed *Aubade* for string trio is particularly noteworthy, with its strong dialogue between the parts.

NIKOLAJ LUND

A slightly more overt French influence, reflecting Enescu's move to study with Fauré in Paris, can be heard in the courtly *Gavotte* of 1898 for the unusual combination of violin, cello and two pianos. Yet the *Pastorale, Menuet triste et Nocturne* for violin and piano duet, written two years later, marks quite an advance, offering the first memorably poignant thematic material.

Indubitably, though, the showstopper is Enescu's famous First *Romanian Rhapsody*, performed here in a brilliant arrangement by Jacques Enoch. This truly sparkles in a performance that is finely balanced and benefits from Alexander Bickard's strong bass-line.

JOANNE TALBOT

A VIOLIN'S LIFE, VOL. 3

GRIEG Violin Sonata no.3 in C minor op.45 **MAIER** Piano Trio in E flat major **TARTINI** Sonata Prima in D major op. 2 no.1

Frank Almond (violin) Alexander Hersh (cello) Victor Santiago Asunción (piano)

AVIE AV2612

An intriguing third volume in the company of a celebrated Strad

This is the third CD that Frank Almond, former concertmaster in Milwaukee, Rotterdam and London, has made featuring composers associated with his 1715 'Lipiński' Stradivari. You may recall that in 2014 he was Tasered by thieves after a concert, but the instrument was soon retrieved.

The main interest here lies in the two works involving Alexander Hersh's cello: Amanda Maier (1853–94) was a Swedish violinist-composer with an attractive musical personality (her Violin Sonata is in vol.2). Her Piano Trio (1873–4), which she played with husband Julius Röntgen and Julius Klengel, had been lost and was rediscovered only lately. With a committed performance it is a strong work and quite a find, influenced by Schumann but with a distinctive flavour of its own: the Scherzo evokes Nordic wood-sprites and the lovely main melody of the Andante returns in the Finale.

Frank Almond and his 'Lipiński' Strad

Tartini's genius burns bright in this D major Sonata, in *sonata da chiesa* form, giving violin and cello almost equal status. Enrico Gatti and friends on Arcana, using period instruments, have special qualities but this performance on modern instruments is well recorded and stylishly played.

In the Grieg sonata, there's some obscuring of short notes in the first movement, but the other movements are fine, with sensitive pianism from Asunción; the the disc is, in any case, worth having for the Maier and Tartini.

TULLY POTTER

OPEN SPACES

KNOX Satellites (String Quartet no.1); Four into Twenty (String Quartet no.2); Quartet for One; One Finger; Ten Fingers; Microtonal Blues; Rick O'Shea

Ragazze Quartet, Garth Knox (viola)

CHANNEL CLASSICS CCS44623

Idiomatic works from a master violist turned composer

Garth Knox has been an eloquent advocate of contemporary music for most of his professional career as a violist, which has included stints with Pierre Boulez's Ensemble Intercontemporain and the Arditti Quartet. For many years now he has also been busy as a composer, mostly but by no means exclusively for his own instrument. This recording brings together the two string quartets he has written to date – three if one includes *Quartet for One* for unaccompanied viola, prompted by Covid-enforced isolation. It also has a selection from Knox's studies in extended techniques, involving glissando, pizzicato, microtones and ricochet (hence the punning *Rick O'Shea*, which in any case does feature echoes of Irish fiddling!).

Of course, these and other techniques also feature extensively in the string quartets themselves, as Knox explains in his detailed booklet notes. In common with his fellow violist–composer Brett Dean, Knox often finds inspiration outside music. *Satellites*, written for the Kronos Quartet, aims to describe movement in outer space, while *Four into Twenty*, commissioned by the present interpreters, reflects upon aspects of life in the 1920s, as we move through this century's own twenties. The Dutch Ragazze Quartet is completely inside Knox's tonally tinged, mercurial music, which – aided by a close, lifelike recording – is presented to the listener with ideal clarity and enormous panache. Knox himself completes the CD with a ruminative rendition of *Quartet for One*, at the opposite end of the expressive spectrum from its dedicatee Lawrence Power's extrovert

JENNIFER BRINDLEY

premiere performance, but equally searching in its timbral exploration.

CARLOS MARÍA SOLARE

LOCATELLI: IL VIRTUOSO, IL POETA

LOCATELLI Violin Concertos: C minor op.3 no.2; A major op.3 no.11; Concerti grossi: C minor op.1 no.11; E flat major, op.7 no.6 'Il pianto d'Arianna'; F minor op.1 no.8 – Pastorale

Isabelle Faust (violin) Il Giardino Armonico/Giovanni Antonini

HARMONIA MUNDI HMM902398

Soulfulness and brilliance are in plentiful supply on this winning album

Isabelle Faust demonstrates her virtuosity in stunning accounts of two concertos from Locatelli's *L'arte del violino* op.3. She breezes through their prescribed technical challenges and performs the capriccios for both works' outer movements with extraordinary dexterity, accuracy and timing, adding apposite post-capriccio cadenzas by Godefridus Reber (1743). Many aspects of her interpretation nod towards HIP, notably her restrained vibrato, clear articulation and imaginative extempore ornamentation.

Compared with op.3, the demands of Locatelli's op.1 no.11 are like chalk and cheese; but Faust gives the opening Largo a pleasing sense of line and interacts sensitively with fellow violin soloist Stefano Barneschi in the Sarabanda. Their Allemanda and Giga are neat, sprightly and abound with rhythmic energy and dynamic contrast. They forge a convincing dramatic scenario for Locatelli's six-movement op.7 no.6, interpreting one version of the Greek myth about Ariadne's abandonment on Naxos. Faust evokes Ariadne's contrasting emotions sensitively and theatrically in recitatives and aria-like slow movements, admirably conveying Ariadne's sorrowful acceptance of her destiny. A slick rendition of the Pastorale from op.1 no.8 is an unconventional finisher, but lengthy procrastination over the final cadence confirms the end. The small string ensemble is constantly alert, but the continuo instruments, laudably varied, occasionally receive a raw deal in the balance.

ROBIN STOWELL

Isabelle Faust goes back to the Baroque in stunning form

MANEEIN Dependent Arising
SHOSTAKOVICH Violin Concerto no.1

Rachel Barton Pine (violin) Royal Scottish National Orchestra/Tito Muñoz

CEDILLE RECORDS CDR90000 223

A Russian concerto meets thrash metal and comes out on top

There's a lot going on here, and it begins with US violinist Rachel Barton Pine's enduring love of thrash metal, which she professes in her illuminating booklet-note. As a result, she asked heavy metal violinist (and leader of rock band Resolution15) Earl Maneein to write her a solo piece, resulting in a full-scale thrash metal violin concerto for Pine, *Dependent Arising*. Then came the question of what to record alongside it, to which the answer was Shostakovich's First Violin Concerto.

They might appear a disconcerting pairing, but the two works share a lot in terms of raw emotion and sometimes grotesque excess – certainly in Pine's muscular, defiant account of the Shostakovich. There's a lot to pick at there: the strangely unbalanced recording, for a start, which places her so forward in the mix that at times she obscures the vivid playing from the Royal Scottish National Orchestra. Or her unwavering confidence and determination, strongly projected throughout, that seems to pay little heed to the composer's darker moments of despair. That said, it's a gripping, overwhelming account, so full of intensity and self-belief (not to mention manic energy) right from the start that there's no chance of attention ever wandering.

In comparison, Maneein's heavy metal concerto feels surprisingly tame – despite its hammer-blow chords and moments of screaming aggression, you'd hardly know it was

MARCO BORGGREVE

metal-inspired (particularly its naively sentimental slow movement) if the composer's witty booklet-note hadn't told you so. Pine dispatches the frenzied virtuosity that Maneein calls for with ease and unerring precision, and the swagger of his noisy finale brings out her larger-than-life flamboyance magnificently. If you can forgive the unapologetic excess in both pieces, this is a genuinely thrilling ride.

DAVID KETTLE

MOZART Violin Sonatas: no.17 K296; nos.18–23 K301–06; nos.24–8 K376–80; no.32 K454; no.33 K481; no.35 K526; no.36, K547; Variations: 'La bergère Célimène' K359; 'Hélas! j'ai perdu mon amant' K360

Renaud Capuçon (violin)

Kit Armstrong (piano)

DG 4864463 (4 CDS)

A French master finds the perfect partner for compelling Mozart

Fun fact: Renaud Capuçon shares his birthday with Mozart – the French violinist is 220 years to the day younger than the Salzburg *wunderkind*. While Capuçon has had skirmishes with Mozart's music on record before, he has recently delved deeply into the violin music, with this four-CD set of the mature sonatas to be followed imminently by the five concertos.

It's customary at this point to remind readers that these are sonatas for piano and violin, in that order, as was standard in the 18th century (and remained so for Beethoven). Nevertheless, while that distinction may hold true for the earliest works, composed by the infant Mozart and not recorded here, experiencing the sequence starting with the Mannheim/Paris set of 1778 and going through to the Viennese sonatas of the mid- and late-1780s shows this to be a bit of a red herring where Mozart is concerned. Right from the outset of the G major Sonata (no.18), the violin is in full-throated diva mode, unfurling a long-breathed vocal line over the piano's Alberti accompaniment.

Renaud Capuçon: sensitively honed Mozart sonatas

SIMON FOWLER

By the time of the mature late works, the integration of instruments is complete, with both sharing the spotlight, supporting, competing, sparring and cajoling on equal terms.

This is music, then, that requires a meeting of minds, and Capuçon seems to have found the perfect foil in the American pianist Kit Armstrong. The recording, made at the Teldex Studio in Berlin, has the piano miked fairly closely but the violin presented with plenty of air around it, highlighting Capuçon's focus on beauty of tone. Mozart's lyric lines come to the fore but the naturalness of the pair's phrasing is such that accompaniment figures never remain just that, consistently shaped and animated with imagination and finesse.

High spirits are the order of the day in many of the earlier sonatas but when Mozart throws a curveball in the form of a work such as no.21 in E minor, its emotional ambivalence stemming from bereavement and the travails of thwarted love, Capuçon and Armstrong draw the listener in with an exquisite balance between defiance and despair. Needless to say, virtuoso passages are thrown off with nonchalant verve. The music making is unforced and natural, and for a tour through the mature sonatas from start to finish – as opposed, say, to Alina Ibragimova and Cédric Tiberghien's survey of the complete music curated into five mixed programmes on Hyperion – you could hardly do better.

DAVID THREASHER

DIVERGENT PATHS

RAVEL String Quartet in F major

SCHOENBERG String Quartet no.1

Telegraph Quartet

AZICA RECORDS ACD 7136027

Highly contrasted readings of a pair of contemporary quartets

These quartets by Ravel and Schoenberg, written a year apart – in 1902–3 and 1904–5 respectively – are progressive and at the same time emblematic of preceding Western traditions. Both refer back to Classicism, and long-established structural devices, but their solutions to the way forward are radically different. Schoenberg's intense, densely written counterpoint demonstrates his allegiance to Bach in its linear weave; equally, the richness of Brahms's harmony and bass-driven invention are at the music's core, and Haydn also makes an appearance. Yet this highly Expressionistic writing shows Schoenberg very much on the edge. The Telegraph Quartet has absorbed these stylistic 'isms' very impressively and achieves a remarkable clarity of texture. The players are alert to the music's emotional power and extreme dynamics, creating an exceptionally varied narrative. And they overcome the potentially thorny issue of intonation, given Schoenberg's highly chromatic language.

Ravel's response to the weight of history is to lace his writing with the perfumes of gamelan and Spanish and Russian music. Here, timbre is raised to structural importance as the music by turns quivers or gives way to a strongly rhythmic drive. The textures are delicate and subtle, the Telegraph's interpretation equally nuanced. Virtuosity is consummate: expressively full one second, lean the next, with the players bending in the wind of Ravel's quixotically shifting sonorities.

JOANNE TALBOT

SANTORO Cello Concerto; Symphony no.8; Three Abstractions; One-Minute Play; Asymptotic Interactions
Marina Martins (cello) Goiás Philharmonic Orchestra/Neil Thomson
NAXOS 8.574410

A young cellist shines more brightly than the music in her concerto debut

It takes almost six minutes for the soloist of Santoro's Cello Concerto to show up. She sidles in almost unnoticed, like a diffident date or a train so late it has fallen off the timetable. That's Santoro for you. However familiar (or not) you are with his music, all you can expect is the unexpected. Blind listening to any single point on this album might lead you to guess you're hearing a pupil of Prokofiev or Lutosławski or John Barry. Even when the soloist comes to dominate the long opening movement with a cadenza, there's a pensive and capricious reluctance in the writing – or at least that's how Marina Martins brings it off in this premiere recording.

She is placed well forward in the mix, as well she might be given Santoro's heavy orchestral battery. It cannot be said, for all its eclecticism, that this piece contains all that much emotional variety, tilted as it is towards the struggle-and-defiance narrative of most mid-century works in the genre. However, Martins finds points of relaxed extroversion in the finale, which is driven forward by a native ostinato rhythm.

At 24, now making her career in Europe, the Brazilian cellist has put her flag on the map with this recording, just as Neil Thomson continues to make the case for Santoro's music as part of the 'Music from Brazil' series on Naxos. The compact Eighth Symphony barely even fills the space of the concerto's first movement. The strings of the Goiás Philharmonic are put through their paces by the violent contrasts, deliquescent forms and quarter-tone harmony of the *Three Abstractions*.

PETER QUANTRILL

SPERGER String Quartets op.1: no.1 in F major, no.2 in A major, no.3 in C major
Members of the Kammerakademie Potsdam
CPO 555470-2

A premiere recording shines light on a Mozart contemporary

Celebrated chiefly as a leading bassist, Johannes Sperger (1750–1812) was also a prolific composer, particularly of symphonies, double bass concertos and chamber works. His three op.1 quartets each comprise three movements in a fast–slow–fast sequence and approximate the styles of Mozart and Haydn.

Using reproduction period bows, these performers are persuasive advocates of Sperger's music, engaging with it intelligently and buoyantly. The musical weight of his op.1 quartets lies in their spirited first movements, in which leader Peter Rainer realises his pre-eminent melodic role with character and poise, making pleasing dynamic contrasts and adding occasional extempore ornamentation. Rainer is especially expressive in contemplative slow movements, such as the aria-like Adagio of no.3, in which he employs subtle rubato, and he shapes a serene line above the restless undercurrents in the Adagio cantabile of no.2. His colleagues are also given opportunities to strut their stuff, violist Christoph Starke and cellist Jan-Peter Kuschel making impressive bravura contributions in the outer movements, particularly during episodes in the rondo finales. Kuschel clearly relishes his bustling solo role in the rondo of no.1, but the ensemble's brisk tempo results in some of his passagework sounding like bees around a honey pot. The commendable recording combines intimacy with a lively ambience.

ROBIN STOWELL

Reviews

BOOKS

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The ABRSM is to be congratulated. The 2024 violin syllabus displays new flexibility, inclusivity and engagement, while retaining the structures of assessment that teachers will be familiar with. Every book of exam pieces contains new repertoire, which may at first seem a bit scary for some teachers, but there are now expanded lists of alternatives – 39 pieces for each grade to choose from, 70 per cent of which have appeared in previous syllabuses. This gives pupils and teachers plenty of choice, enabling them to explore new or different styles, cultures and genres, while retaining the possibility of learning many old favourites if they prefer.

The syllabus is full of works by living and under-represented composers. It is particularly gratifying to find pieces included by alumni of the ABRSM's fledgling composer mentoring programme, now in its second year. *Lake of Ice* by Shruthi Rajasekar (Grade 2) and *Shanty for Ludwig* by James B. Wilson (Grade 3) are both very approachable pieces with just enough difficulty for the level. The *Shanty* will surely inspire any young player to explore the source: the second movement of Beethoven's Ninth.

There are many highlights in the new lists which should be explored. It was refreshing to discover several pieces with which I was unfamiliar, including two at Grade 4: *The Deserted Garden* by Florence Price, and *The Legend of Ashitaka* by Joe Hisaishi, which is in turn lyrical and well suited to the violin at this level, but also contains quintessential Japanese modes. It will make a great concert piece. I am pleased to be introduced to the sumptuous *Allegretto non troppo* by Mel Bonis, a Debussy contemporary, which has challenges in sound production and shifting at Grade 7 level. Included for Grade 8 is the wonderful Romance by Amy Beach which was dedicated to her friend Maud Powell, the celebrated violinist of the early 20th century.

With all this new repertoire, it is helpful that there are downloadable recordings available, including accompaniment-only versions, to aid pupils and teachers as they explore. These recordings are made by the partnerships of Ruth Rogers (violin) and Martin Cousin (piano) and Simon and Saoko Blendis (violin and piano respectively). These performances are generous and beautiful, while never going over the top in a way that might put off or intimidate some learners. It is good to hear where top performers choose differing fingerings or shifts from the printed page (a regular occurrence in these recordings) which allows pupils similar freedom, and I can't help but smile when I hear world-class musicians performing the theme from *The Flintstones* (Grade 1).

The ABRSM has included helpful and engaging information and advice for each piece, either from the composer themselves or from one of the consultants. Philippa Bunting is particularly encouraging. She offers tips on what the young musician can focus on to make the performance most effective. It is pleasing to read here the focus on character of sound rather than mere accuracy.

There will always be debate on whether the ABRSM has correctly pitched the level of each piece for each specific grade. The lists continue to include sonata movements by Mozart and Beethoven, for example, that contain stylistic nuances well beyond the 'Grade', but every pupil has different strengths, and with these greatly expanded choices teachers and pupils will find plenty to suit each individual learner. It is important to note that the new

The new ABRSM exam pieces are graded for all abilities

GETTY

Grade 1 level feels slightly harder now – there is a little more regular requirement to slur, to cross strings and to play C naturals. The Initial Grade feels a bit more like Grade 1 used to, and Beethoven's *Ode to Joy*, a Grade 1 staple until this year, would now surely find itself moved down to the lower grade. The Initial Grade Pack (there is a pack for viola too) is a new venture for this syllabus and contains everything in one volume (with the exception of aural tests): a violin part, piano accompaniment, scales (including A natural minor), sightreading examples and a link to the audio downloads.

The ABRSM has succeeded in producing a much more interesting and stimulating syllabus for violin. Might it be possible to produce something just as strong for the viola?

ALEX LAING

ABRSM CELLO EXAM PIECES FROM 2024

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GRADE 1: £17.50 GRADE 2: £19.50

GRADE 3: £21 GRADE 4: £23

GRADE 5: £28

In its new cello syllabus, for use in exams from January 2024, it is good to see that the ABRSM has a bigger choice of pieces than ever, with more cello duets and pieces by new composers and greater diversity of styles. Before 2020 candidates had just six pieces to choose from in each of the three lists. No books of exam pieces were published for cello; however, all the pieces in the syllabus were available on CD, giving them equal prominence.

The first Cello Exam Pieces books (for grades 1–5 only) were introduced in 2020, with three pieces from each list selected for inclusion, and audio versions of these pieces available from the online shop. The number of pieces on the syllabus increased to ten in each list, to bring it more in line with other exam boards.

The 2024 syllabus has increased still further to 13 pieces in each list, many from previous syllabuses and from popular compilations such as the ABRSM Time Pieces series, and, in the lower grades, Boosey & Hawkes's Stepping Stones series and OUP's Cello Time books. However, as in 2020, the only audio versions available (in cello and piano and piano only versions for each piece) are for the nine pieces selected for the books.

A welcome innovation for 2024 is the option in grades 1–3 to play more of the pieces as cello duets with your teacher – there are nine opportunities to do this in Grade 1 alone, although none in the Exam Pieces books, all of which come with piano accompaniment books included.

Also new is the fact that the small-print paragraphs at the bottom of the pieces now give useful performance suggestions – 'smile through your instrument as you fly up to fourth position', the Grade 2 pupil is told, perhaps rather optimistically.

GETTY

Introduced in 2020, the Initial Grade is a marked pre-Grade 1 exam, and comes with a particularly comprehensive book including scales and sightreading. There are some charming new pieces for 2024, including *Ladybird Laze* by young composer Jemima Oosthuizen, to be played as if 'snoring in the sunshine', and Bob Dylan's *Blowin' in the Wind*.

Other popular works included for the first time in grades 1-5 are a natty *Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious* in C major (Grade 1), Leonard Cohen's *Hallelujah* (Grade 2), Hans Zimmer's 'He's a Pirate' from *Pirates of the Caribbean* (quite challenging rhythmically for Grade 3, but still likely to prove a hit) and 'America' from *West Side Story* (Grade 4).

Each book includes at least one piece by a female composer. I particularly liked Florence Price's *Rabbit Foot* for Grade 3 (though confusingly the recording does not follow the given bowing, slurring groups of semiquavers marked separately) and Norwegian Anna Lindeman's sunny *Tusenfryd* (Waltz). Classical favourites also get a look in at Grade 5, with the Waltz from Tchaikovsky's *Sleeping Beauty* and Dvořák's *Humoreske*, and there's the usual nod to world music with the traditional Zulu *Siyahamba* (Grade 1) and *The Chengdu Hibiscus* by Shanti Jayasinha (Grade 4). It is good to see Bartók appearing in the early grades, with *Baking Song* (Grade 1) and *The Girls of Kis-Szele* and *The Song of the Drunkard* (Grade 3), but in terms of music from the past century, there is not much that is harmonically more adventurous.

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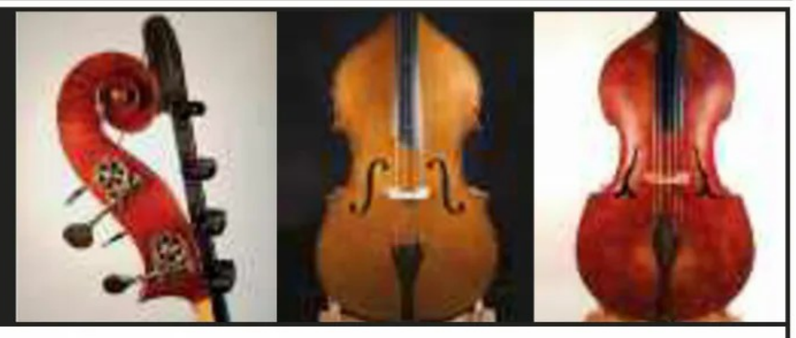

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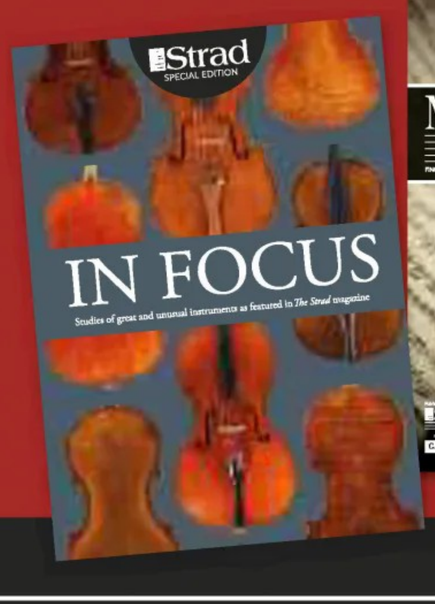

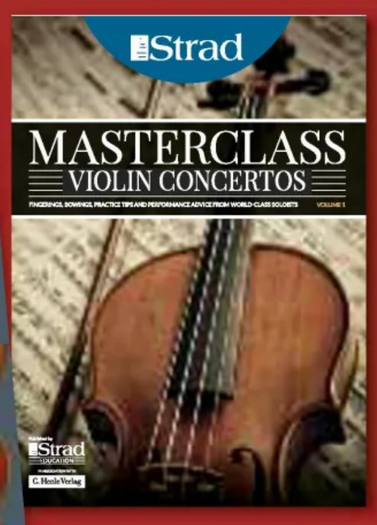

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From the ARCHIVE

FROM THE STRAD — OCTOBER 1893 — VOL.4 NO.42

The Strad selects some highlights from the memoirs of violinist Charles Dancla (1817–1907), recently published in Paris

This work by the eminent French violinist was published not long since in Paris. It is a capital book, full of good reading for fiddlers, and contains many interesting reminiscences. It is not a straight-up and straight-down autobiography, but a real book, full of vigorous expressions of opinion by a man who believed in himself; and a book by a man who has great respect for the opinions of No.1 is certain to be interesting.

When Dancla was about thirteen he heard Paganini play, "and," says he, "his violin still sings in my ears." He declares that the finger ensemble of Paganini, "so indispensable in obtaining sureness of intonation," was approached by Vieuxtemps alone. "Some artists," Dancla says, "have said that Paganini was a dazzling meteor who left no trace of his path. I dispute the validity of this opinion, because to-day, as then, Paganini has rendered a great service to intelligent violinists, who have gained inspiration by novel effects once peculiar to him. I believe that outside of the works of Bach, Tartini, Locatelli, Campagnoli, and other ancient and modern works especially contrived for enlarging the play of the fingers, it is necessary to study seriously the studies of Paganini, which are masterpieces, a very monument of the art of violin playing. In spite of the abandon which Paganini gave to a phrase, he was exact in his delivery of a measure." In 1830 Dancla admired the irreproachable bearing of De Beriot, and also his purity of tone. "His style was of a rare exactness, and his bowing was remarkably supple." Dancla was convinced that De Beriot adopted the same trick as Paganini in the performance of his concertos, i.e. all the strings were raised a semitone.

In 1837 Dancla played for the first time at the Societe des Concerts, and an amateur offered him a fine Stradivarius. Dancla worked at it for some time, but at length threw it aside, and played on his own, an instrument of Gand *père*.

Here are a few of Dancla's opinions on some other matters pertaining to the fiddle:—"Vieuxtemps was a virtuoso in the best sense of the term; his style was large, clear, sonorous, powerful, transparent, perfect in intonation; his bowing was supple, his staccato was pure. Everything was united in him, and he was a remarkable composer."

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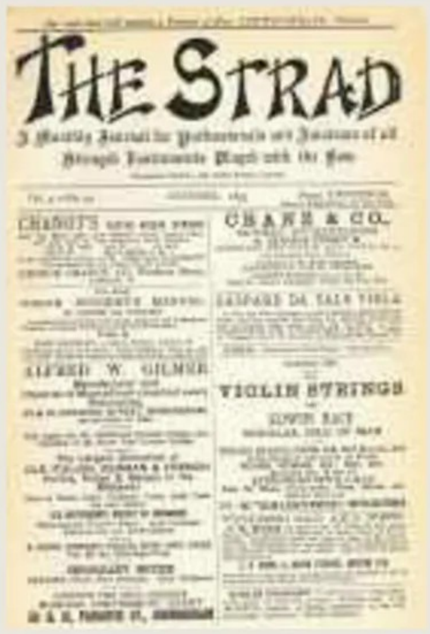
From these extracts it will be evident that Dancla is not only a good player but an acceptable writer. ●

NICOLE ROCHE

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Sentimental *Work*

SERGEJ KRYLOV

Mstislav Rostropovich had some resonant words of wisdom for the Soviet-born Italian violinist when they worked together on Shostakovich's Violin Concerto no.1

For me, Shostakovich's First Violin Concerto is one of the greatest concertos of the 20th century. I first heard it when I was around 24, on a recording with David Oistrakh performing the solo part. From the first note of the piece I was completely in love, and when I started performing it a few years later, it made me feel like I was flying. It's a very big, complex concerto in four movements, with a huge cadenza in the third. The music is incredible throughout, filled both with irony and the tragedies of the Soviet regime. Technically it's a very challenging piece, but what I think is more difficult is to capture the atmosphere that Shostakovich wanted to evoke, particularly in the mystery of the opening movement. My feelings about this concerto are intimately tied up with my memories of Mstislav Rostropovich, and how his understanding of the piece proved inspirational for me.

I knew Slava for the last five years of his life. I first met him on 27 March 2002 at the Barbican, where he was celebrating his 75th birthday. There I gave him an invitation to Cremona that September, where he was granted honorary citizenship of the city, a ceremony where I was honoured to play for him for the first time. After that we became friends and performed around the world, with him conducting and me playing the Beethoven Violin Concerto, then the Tchaikovsky, and finally the Shostakovich.

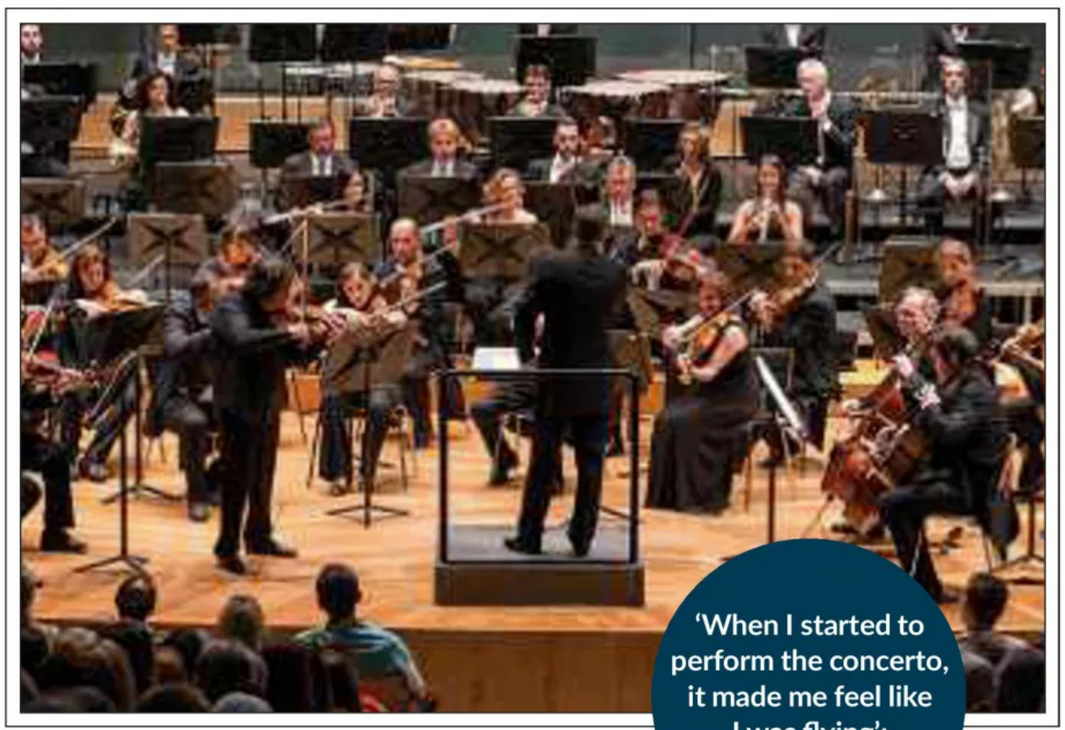
In 2006 I phoned Slava to ask if he'd mind listening to me play, before our first orchestral rehearsal. He invited me to his Paris apartment, and I found him busy making an inventory of his huge art collection. We went into a darkened room where the curtains allowed just a little light in, and I played the whole concerto with a pianist accompanying me. Then we worked specifically on the first movement: Slava said, 'I'd like to explain something, first of all. Imagine yourself in the middle of a forest, just before the break of dawn, and you just hear complete silence. Then you catch the first glimpse of the sun's rays through the trees, and at that moment time stands still. This is the atmosphere you have to create from this music.'

He had an incredible gift for conjuring up a visual image, in Russian, to describe his thoughts; it was like he was evoking a scene from a film by Andrei Tarkovsky. Then, as I continued he said, 'Now imagine the same scene but you're not a part of it. Instead you're observing it from the outside, from an omniscient perspective.'

We spent a long time together, but we only worked on that first movement. When we were finished, he came to the door to wish me goodbye, and said, 'Sergej, now let me tell you: when you do manage to find the right mental state for this piece... it's already too late.' I think he meant that he himself had finally found his own musical–philosophical way of understanding the universe. And, as it turned out, that was my last meeting with him. In the end, we never got to perform the concerto together on stage because he became too ill, and passed away in April 2007. I'm very grateful for the five years I knew him, and for the immense inspiration he gave me.

After that, my perspective of the concerto changed radically. When I perform it now, it gives me a magical sense of levitation and a unique perception of the universe through the music. As Plato said: 'Music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, and life to everything.' ●

INTERVIEW BY CHRISTIAN LLOYD



'When I started to perform the concerto, it made me feel like I was flying': Sergej Krylov

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